Film Quarterly

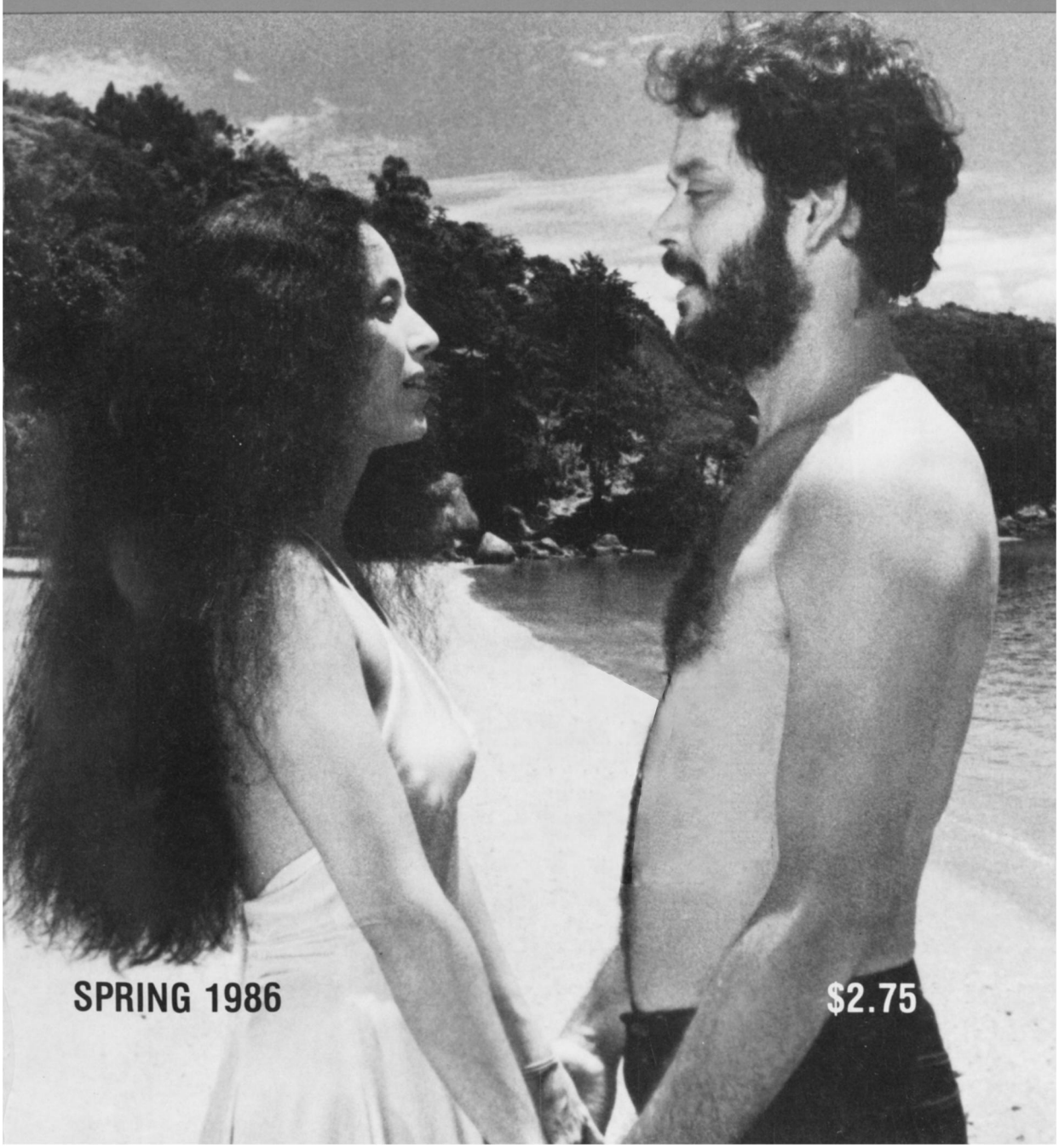
THE SACRAMENTS OF GENRE

SCHRADER'S *MISHIMA*

INCEST *VERTIGO*

RAMBO *SPIDER WOMAN*

WAY DOWN EAST RESTORED



SPRING 1986

$2.75

St. Martin's Press Presents

AUSTRALIAN CINEMA
The First Eighty Years
Graham Shirley and Brian Adams

A detailed and comprehensive history of Australian film-making from its origins to the period just before it gained renown in the late 1970s. The authors trace the industry from its pioneering days—the silent era from 1896-1929, the move into sound in the 1930s, the sharp decline under the constraints of American control that was not halted until the 'sixties—to its spectacular revival in 1965 and internationally acclaimed films such as *My Brilliant Career, Breaker Morant, The Road Warrior,* and *Gallipoli.*

1985 325 pp. (illus.) 0-312-06126-9 $27.50

SECRET AGENTS IN FICTION
Ian Fleming, John le Carre, and Len Deighton
Lars Ole Sauerberg

This study provides a brief history of the genre and a detailed exploration of the writings of Fleming, le Carre, and Deighton. The author identifies a literary formula comprised of five main elements the writers share, a formula seen both as a vehicle of traditional literary conventions and a framework well-suited for presenting modern international tensions in a dramatic way.

1984 260 pp. 0-312-70846-7 $19.95

THE HOLLYWOOD STUDIO SYSTEM
Douglas Gomery

This book is an examination of the workings of the Hollywood studio system between 1930 and 1949, the so-called "Golden Age," when the US motion picture industry dominated the world's mass entertainment business. After a survey of the functions of the system as a whole, individual chapters analyze the structures of each of the major studio corporations, dealing with management, finance, labor and production, distribution, and exhibition.

1985 240 pp. 0-312-38845-4 $25.00

now in paperback . . .

THE CINEMATIC APPARATUS
Edited by Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath

"A stimulating exploration of the technical and social aspects of film, *The Cinematic Apparatus* quotes filmmakers, communicators, and scholars on a variety of problems, from color, sound and animation to feminism, avant-garde and the machinery/metapsychology of the medium."—*Millimeter*

"For once, technology is integrated in the process of meaning and ideological signification, carrying forward the work of *Cahiers du Cinema.*"—*Film Comment*

"The book as a whole should be taken as the record of that moment in the history of film studies when theorists, historians, avant-garde filmmakers, and feminists began to engage one another across very different lines of interest, looking at the role of technology with much more sophisticated eyes."—*Quarterly Review of Film Studies*

The results of a major conference held in 1978 by the Center for Twentieth Century Studies, the essays in this volume investigate the complex relationship between the technical and social aspects of film and the cultural implications of film technology.

1985 213 pp. 0-312-13908-X $11.95

CINEMA, POLITICS, AND SOCIETY IN AMERICA
Edited by Philip John Davies and Brian Neve

This unique collection of essays, each of which has been specially commissioned for this volume, explores the complex relationships between the themes and images of American film and those of the "real" world of politics, culture and society. Tracing the changing role of the American film industry from the 1930s to the present, they examine particular aspects of American life—black culture, the working class, the police, the West, the automotive culture and technology—by analyzing their treatment in American film and addressing public and political reactions to American films.

1985 266 pp. 0-312-13902-0 $12.95

St. Martin's Press Scholarly and Reference Books
175 Fifth Avenue • New York, NY 10010

VOLUME XXXIX, No. 3 Spring 1986

ARTICLES

The Fragility of Meaning: Three Films by Paul Cox MICHAEL DEMPSEY 2
Formally subtle but initially baffling emotionally, Cox's work explores psychic areas usually left untouched.

The Sacraments of Genre: Coppola, DePalma, Scorsese LEO BRAUDY 17
The genre game as played by these self-styled "outsiders" lends their films the transcendent spirituality of ritual power.

The Critic as Consumer: Film Study in the University, *Vertigo*, and the Film Canon VIRGINIA WRIGHT WEXMAN 32
The recent rise of Hitchcock's film to canonical status signifies class interests at work in the tastes of film scholars.

INTERVIEWS

Schrader's *Mishima*: An Interview KAREN JAEHNE 11
The director explains his unwelcomed formal innovations, his film's bizarre production history, and the mystery of Mishima's life.

Why Has Incest Always Been Repressed? A Conversation with Alberto Moravia GIDEON BACHMANN 29
Curious relations between taboos and pleasure are implicit in *The Life*, now being filmed by Giovanni Soldati.

REVIEWS

Kiss of the Spider Woman MAURIZIO VIANO 41
Babenco's film, about the points where orthodox revolutionary politics meets with sexual oppression, is a needed message to the left.

Broadway Danny Rose BRIAN HENDERSON 46
Allen's first post-analytic film also marks a change for the better in richness of characterization and complexity of narrative.

Rambo: First Blood Part II TOM DOHERTY 50
The new mini-genre, the POW film, is intriguing and its political significance not easy to read.

Way Down East STEVE VINEBERG 52
Griffith's masterpiece, now restored, has a meticulous, rhymed, novelistic finish that no one has seen in six decades.

The Is/Land SCOTT MACDONALD 57
Two exiled South Africans have produced an intricate collage work mixing political, linguistic, and aesthetic perspectives.

Se Permuta PAT AUFDERHEIDE 59
Juan Carlos Tabío has welded sit-com to commedia dell'arte in this charming farce about Cuba's housing shortage.

BOOKS

Dreadful Pleasures CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT 60

CONTROVERSY AND CORRESPONDENCE

Seeing and Being DENIS WOOD 62

THE COVER: Sonia Braga and Raul Julia in Hector Babenco's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (see page 41).

Editor's Notebook

HYBRIDIZING MEDIA

One from the Heart attempted to utilize video technology in the service of large-scale, studio-style narrative film. Now Rob Nilsson, director of the visually elegant *Northern Lights* (shot by Judy Irola), has turned to video for the shooting of a modest, limited-cast, largely improvised Cassavetes-style work, *Signal 7*. The results suggest that the particular virtues of video—its quickness and "lightness"—serve this kind of film-making especially well.

Nilsson drove cabs in his youth, and *Signal 7's* story line concerns a group of cabdrivers in San Francisco, several of them middle-aged but still aspiring actors. ("Signal 7" is radio code for a driver in trouble.) *Variety* termed the film "a tale of quiet desperation," and so it is; but both its visual and performance style are exhilarating. The video image is finally capable of deep blacks; its color range is intriguingly different from that of film stock, especially when working with available light as Nilsson did—even in rain-soaked San Francisco nights. The shooting was done in six long nights, with two handheld cameras running, working very close-up, which made it possible to capture intimate improvised scenes and also to edit them flexibly. (Nilsson directed the camera operators through a TV-floor earphone system. He could also keep the cameras rolling, interrupt the actors briefly, then push on without destroying the improvisational flow.) The result is not only a promisingly inexpensive technical hybrid, but a stylistically powerful one—combining the electric *cinéma vérité* sense of catching human events on the fly with the slightly surreal phosphor colors of video. *Signal 7* is an experiment that should inspire many intriguing applications.

CONTRIBUTORS

GIDEON BACHMANN is a television film-maker and our Rome Editor. PAT AUFDERHEIDE often writes for *In These Times*. LEO BRAUDY, a member of our editorial board, teaches at USC. MICHAEL DEMPSEY, our Los Angeles Editor, recently completed a novel, *Dream Sequence*. TOM DOHERTY now teaches at Boston University. KAREN JAEHNE writes for *Variety* and plans film programs in Washington, D.C. SCOTT MACDONALD has interviewed many avant-garde filmmakers; he frequently contributes to *Afterimage*. CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT teaches at Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT. MAURIZIO VIANO teaches Italian and cinema at Wellesley College. DENIS WOOD, a geographer and lifelong film enthusiast, teaches at North Carolina State University. STEVEN VINEBERG teaches at College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA. VIRGINIA WRIGHT WEXMAN is the editor of *Cinema Journal* and teaches at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

FILM QUARTERLY (ISSN 0015-1386) is published quarterly at the subscription prices given below by the University of California Press, Berkeley, California 94720. Second-class postage paid at Berkeley, California, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to **Film Quarterly**, University of California Press, Berkeley CA 94720. $2.75 per copy, $11.00 per year for individuals; $19.00 per year for institutions. Subscribers outside USA add $3.00 for postage. Payment may be made with UNESCO book coupons. Please allow 4 months for first issue to be received. Back issues available at $5.00. Editor: Ernest Callenbach. Assistant to the Editor: Bonnie Dehler. New York Editor: William Johnson. Los Angeles Editor: Michael Dempsey. Boston Editor: Randall Conrad. London Editor: Colin Young. Rome Editor: Gideon Bachmann. Advisory Editorial Board: Leo Braudy, Andries Deinum, John Fell, Brian Henderson, Albert Johnson, Marsha Kinder, Neal Oxenhandler. Views expressed in signed articles are those of the authors. Indexed in **Art Index, Book Review Index, Film Literature Index, Humanities Index, International Index to Film Periodicals, Monthly Cumulating Periodical Index**, and **Popular Periodical Index.** Printed in U.S.A. Type: Freedmen's Organization, Los Angeles. Printing: Malloy Lithographing. © 1986 by the Regents of the University of California. Back issues subsequent to Volume 18 (1965-1966) can be obtained from the University of California Press.

VOLUME XXXIX, No. 3 Spring 1986

ARTICLES

The Fragility of Meaning: Three Films by Paul Cox MICHAEL DEMPSEY 2
Formally subtle but initially baffling emotionally, Cox's work explores psychic areas usually left untouched.

The Sacraments of Genre: Coppola, DePalma, Scorsese LEO BRAUDY 17
The genre game as played by these self-styled "outsiders" lends their films the transcendent spirituality of ritual power.

The Critic as Consumer: Film Study in the University, *Vertigo*, and the Film Canon VIRGINIA WRIGHT WEXMAN 32
The recent rise of Hitchcock's film to canonical status signifies class interests at work in the tastes of film scholars.

INTERVIEWS

Schrader's *Mishima*: An Interview KAREN JAEHNE 11
The director explains his unwelcomed formal innovations, his film's bizarre production history, and the mystery of Mishima's life.

Why Has Incest Always Been Repressed? A Conversation with Alberto Moravia GIDEON BACHMANN 29
Curious relations between taboos and pleasure are implicit in *The Life*, now being filmed by Giovanni Soldati.

REVIEWS

Kiss of the Spider Woman MAURIZIO VIANO 41
Babenco's film, about the points where orthodox revolutionary politics meets with sexual oppression, is a needed message to the left.

Broadway Danny Rose BRIAN HENDERSON 46
Allen's first post-analytic film also marks a change for the better in richness of characterization and complexity of narrative.

Rambo: First Blood Part II TOM DOHERTY 50
The new mini-genre, the POW film, is intriguing and its political significance not easy to read.

Way Down East STEVE VINEBERG 52
Griffith's masterpiece, now restored, has a meticulous, rhymed, novelistic finish that no one has seen in six decades.

The Is/Land SCOTT MACDONALD 57
Two exiled South Africans have produced an intricate collage work mixing political, linguistic, and aesthetic perspectives.

Se Permuta PAT AUFDERHEIDE 59
Juan Carlos Tabío has welded sit-com to commedia dell'arte in this charming farce about Cuba's housing shortage.

BOOKS

Dreadful Pleasures CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT 60

CONTROVERSY AND CORRESPONDENCE

Seeing and Being DENIS WOOD 62

THE COVER: Sonia Braga and Raul Julia in Hector Babenco's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (see page 41).

Editor's Notebook

HYBRIDIZING MEDIA

One from the Heart attempted to utilize video technology in the service of large-scale, studio-style narrative film. Now Rob Nilsson, director of the visually elegant *Northern Lights* (shot by Judy Irola), has turned to video for the shooting of a modest, limited-cast, largely improvised Cassavetes-style work, *Signal 7*. The results suggest that the particular virtues of video—its quickness and "lightness"—serve this kind of film-making especially well.

Nilsson drove cabs in his youth, and *Signal 7's* story line concerns a group of cabdrivers in San Francisco, several of them middle-aged but still aspiring actors. ("Signal 7" is radio code for a driver in trouble.) *Variety* termed the film "a tale of quiet desperation," and so it is; but both its visual and performance style are exhilarating. The video image is finally capable of deep blacks; its color range is intriguingly different from that of film stock, especially when working with available light as Nilsson did—even in rain-soaked San Francisco nights. The shooting was done in six long nights, with two handheld cameras running, working very close-up, which made it possible to capture intimate improvised scenes and also to edit them flexibly. (Nilsson directed the camera operators through a TV-floor earphone system. He could also keep the cameras rolling, interrupt the actors briefly, then push on without destroying the improvisational flow.) The result is not only a promisingly inexpensive technical hybrid, but a stylistically powerful one—combining the electric *cinéma vérité* sense of catching human events on the fly with the slightly surreal phosphor colors of video. *Signal 7* is an experiment that should inspire many intriguing applications.

CONTRIBUTORS

GIDEON BACHMANN is a television film-maker and our Rome Editor. PAT AUFDERHEIDE often writes for *In These Times*. LEO BRAUDY, a member of our editorial board, teaches at USC. MICHAEL DEMPSEY, our Los Angeles Editor, recently completed a novel, *Dream Sequence*. TOM DOHERTY now teaches at Boston University. KAREN JAEHNE writes for *Variety* and plans film programs in Washington, D.C. SCOTT MACDONALD has interviewed many avant-garde filmmakers; he frequently contributes to *Afterimage*. CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT teaches at Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT. MAURIZIO VIANO teaches Italian and cinema at Wellesley College. DENIS WOOD, a geographer and lifelong film enthusiast, teaches at North Carolina State University. STEVEN VINEBERG teaches at College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA. VIRGINIA WRIGHT WEXMAN is the editor of *Cinema Journal* and teaches at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

FILM QUARTERLY (ISSN 0015-1386) is published quarterly at the subscription prices given below by the University of California Press, Berkeley, California 94720. Second-class postage paid at Berkeley, California, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to **Film Quarterly**, University of California Press, Berkeley CA 94720. $2.75 per copy, $11.00 per year for individuals; $19.00 per year for institutions. Subscribers outside USA add $3.00 for postage. Payment may be made with UNESCO book coupons. Please allow 4 months for first issue to be received. Back issues available at $5.00. Editor: Ernest Callenbach. Assistant to the Editor: Bonnie Dehler. New York Editor: William Johnson. Los Angeles Editor: Michael Dempsey. Boston Editor: Randall Conrad. London Editor: Colin Young. Rome Editor: Gideon Bachmann. Advisory Editorial Board: Leo Braudy, Andries Deinum, John Fell, Brian Henderson, Albert Johnson, Marsha Kinder, Neal Oxenhandler. Views expressed in signed articles are those of the authors. Indexed in **Art Index, Book Review Index, Film Literature Index, Humanities Index, International Index to Film Periodicals, Monthly Cumulating Periodical Index**, and **Popular Periodical Index.** Printed in U.S.A. Type: Freedmen's Organization, Los Angeles. Printing: Malloy Lithographing. © 1986 by the Regents of the University of California. Back issues subsequent to Volume 18 (1965-1966) can be obtained from the University of California Press.

MICHAEL DEMPSEY

The Fragility of Meaning:
THREE FILMS BY PAUL COX

Quietly, almost obliquely during the past couple of years, as three of his movies, *Lonely Hearts, Man of Flowers,* and *My First Wife* have opened here, Dutch-Australian director Paul Cox has been revealing his bemusingly unclassifiable talent to American audiences. By turns mordant, poetic, hilarious, gnomic, and angry, these small-scale productions (each reportedly shot for $1 million or less in as few as three weeks) tunnel into those old perplexities, isolation and loneliness, but at skewed angles and with a bracingly idiosyncratic spirit to match the quirky, sometimes dumbfounding crochets, obsessions, and rages of their characters.

In *Lonely Hearts,* Peter, a 50-year-old bachelor piano tuner, launches into a life of his own after his mother dies. He meets Patricia, an almost Victorian frightened mid-thirties spinster, through a dating bureau, and the two of them tumble into a maze of tragicomic miscommunication as each tries to slough off a deadening past and come to grips with commingled fear and desire. *Man of Flowers* takes us into the bizarre private world of Charles Bremer, an aging aesthete, newly rich, profoundly eccentric, and the outré relationship which arises between him and a young model whom he pays to strip for him once a week to the music of Donizetti. By contrast, *My First Wife* begins in utter conventionality with a long marriage but quickly veers into the varieties and extremes of loss, shame, and self-destruction when the marriage abruptly disintegrates. "Why should we be alone in a society that has all the means to communicate so well?" Cox has wondered aloud. And he has offered a couple of answers: "It has puzzled me in modern society how much we long for warmth, for love, and how within this society, we are usually conditioned into wanting, which makes us consumers, so we want another car or a new dress. I'm quite sure that people would much rather be loved than have a new car or a new dress. . . . I think most people so want something to make them stop *wanting things* and to think about why they live the way they do, even if it means they only shrug and decide they like it all just as it is." Worthy sentiments, but entirely misleading if they make anybody expect single-minded, Marxist-oriented dissections of latter-day capitalism. For Cox's work (or these examples of it, at any rate, the only ones I have seen) has locked into something other than society as the source of isolation and loneliness. Idiosyncrasy, solipsism, eccentricity—these are the salient traits of the people who fire Cox's imagination, for no matter what their social context, to him these are the bedrock elements of all human feelings and entanglements.

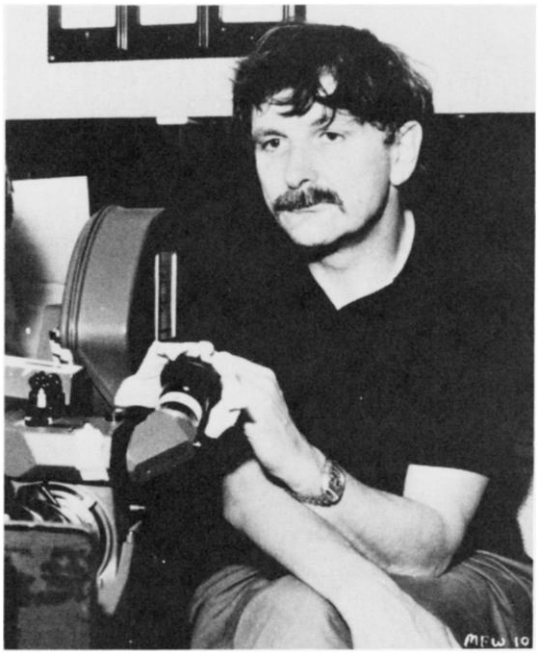
Born Paul Henrique Benedictus Cox in Venlo, Holland, on April 16, 1940, the future film-maker, whose father ran a production firm that made documentaries, grew up in war-disrupted Europe "in an atmosphere very much like the house of flowers. My childhood was steeped in moody, dark, bitter memories." Some of these, he has said, derived from a favorite attic where as a boy he spent many solitary hours playing in the darkness with an old movie projector—a circumstance interestingly similar to Ingmar Bergman's own descriptions of his early contacts with film. "I was always impressed by how clear everything was in the dark," Cox put it years later.

A foreign-exchange program first took him to Australia as a student in 1963. Two years later, he returned as a settler, opening a photography studio whose success helped to finance early experiments as a movie-making hobbyist. ("I always say that if you want to do something really seriously, do it as a hobby. . . . I'm not a film-maker out of ambition. I never thought I would be a film-maker. It's pure compulsion. I have no option.")

Starting in 1965 with short personal films and documentaries, Cox eventually made his first feature, *Illuminations* (1976), which has

been described as a "nightmarishly surreal story about an Australian man and a Hungarian woman living together in a volatile love relationship." Along with more shorts, two additional features followed, *Inside Looking Out* (1977), another examination of a collapsing marriage, and *Kostas* (1979), a story about a Greek journalist refugee from the rightwing regime who comes to Australia and falls in love with an upper-middle-class Australian divorcee. Most recently, Cox has completed *Cactus,* a 1986 release about a Frenchwoman (Isabelle Huppert) who visits Australia and becomes involved with a blind man (Robert Menzies, grandson of former prime minister Robert Menzies).

Viewing himself as an outsider (Melbourne-based) in the Sydney-centered Australian film establishment, Cox has forged a unit of recurrent collaborators, among them actors Norman Kaye and Wendy Hughes, Russian immigrant cinematographer Yuri Sokol, screenwriter Bob Ellis (who recently became a director himself), editor Tim Lewis, associate producer Tony Llewellyn Jones, and producer Jane Ballantyne, who have enabled him to work steadily, cheaply, and independently. "Money doesn't make good films," Cox has stated. "The more money there is, the more people indulge, the more time is wasted . . . You can make a very fine film with seven people—a basic crew. The more people there are, the bigger the threat to the peace of mind of the production." Reportedly, he wants to make a movie about Vincent Van Gogh next.



Paul Cox

If one word can sum up *My First Wife,* that word is "relentless." Few of the many movies which have tackled the emotional maelstrom churned up when a marriage explodes can equal its head-on plunge into the embarrassment, the laceration, and the grim comedy of primal emotions suddenly stripped bare and flayed out of all control. John (John Hargreaves), a composer with a choral piece in rehearsal and a flourishing classical program on the radio, has been so absorbed in his pursuits that he has unwittingly lost the love of his wife Helen (Wendy Hughes), a teacher of English to immigrants and a member of the chorus at his rehearsals. When she ends their ten-year union one night with almost no warning, grief and rage consume him immediately and garishly, to his shock and mortification, for everything about the way he looks, moves, and sounds in the terse opening scenes before he learns the truth suggests a man who views himself as consummately poised, reasonable, "together." Now, as fragments of dormant old memories start flashing through his dreams and his waking thoughts, he practically goes berserk trying to win Helen back: smashing through a door when he finds her with a casual lover, invading her parents' home to howl in one breath that the marriage is sacred to him while denouncing her in the next as a lying whore who has deceived and killed him. Once, he begs Helen with raw abjectness to make love to him, but after she does, her revulsion at his touch, which she simply cannot mask, stabs at him so deeply that he strikes her. Earlier, Helen had accused him (and justly, it seems) of neglecting their shy young daughter Lucy (Lucy Angwin), but now John, as part of his campaign to regain Helen, starts to lavish extravagant, disorienting devotion on the little girl. And as though this were not enough, he is also enduring a deathwatch with his hospitalized father (Robin Lovejoy).

It all sounds, inescapably, like soap opera in the worst sense, and some people—both

MY FIRST WIFE

reviewers and regular moviegoers—have accused Cox of merely spewing *Angst* in all directions, utterly unable to shape it artistically. But control and perspective are precisely what he has brought to this unsparing dissection of a man struggling for both, yet dismally, humiliatingly unable to find them in himself or anywhere else. Part of the reason lies in a cultural contradiction that entraps him. Nowadays, everyone from feminists to publishers of self-help manuals continually urges the emotionally constipated adult male to express his emotions freely. Although *My First Wife* does not show this advice explicitly influencing John, he certainly takes it, and the results are anything but pretty. Like the hero of *Smash Palace,* he holds nothing back. Even the most empathetic viewers undoubtedly cringe at this spectacle at least part of the time (I definitely did) and feel compelled to condemn John as a self-pitying, self-righteous asshole whose "love" is just selfish possessiveness. Helen herself says this, convincingly extending the indictment to men in general. In fact, Cox never evades John's responsibility for his predicament. Yet this kind of blaming is finally irrelevant to the essential theme of *My First Wife,* which is the fragility of life-sustaining meaning. For John, its fountainheads are marriage, art, and dreams; Cox undermines each.

In its portrait of a suddenly abandoned marriage partner, *My First Wife* inevitably suggests a rawer *Kramer vs. Kramer* or *An Unmarried Woman,* but without their focus on the bereft partner's fresh start or social backdrop. Instead, Cox looks at the transience of love. We see Helen in bed with a lover (David Cameron) in the first sequence, intercut with John broadcasting at his studio. Thus, when she denies that involvement with another man motivated her decision, we may suspect her of lying. Soon, though, it becomes clear that she is not; her bed partner proves to be just a casual stud. Nor do John's faults really account for the breakup in any specific way. The issue is the mysterious, unsettling disappearance of love—for all these reasons and for none of them. It just vanished, long ago, and its absence has finally become too demoralizing for her. When her mother, our mirror, presses for some particular motive, Helen simply says, "The loss of love is very real. I miss it." Or, as one of her students puts it fliply, "It's been seven years, ten months, and two days since I didn't love mine suddenly one night."

Cox contrasts John and Helen as they try to regenerate existential meaning. Helen uncertainly yet forthrightly casts herself free of the dead relationship although she has no substitute at hand. Even when her mother

MY FIRST WIFE

asks, appalled, "While his father is dying?" Helen's resolve sticks. However, despite his neglect of his wedlock, John has made it so integral to his identity that its collapse seems like more than just another broken marriage. "*My* life, *my* wife, *my* marriage, *my* music," he shouts with unabashed egotism, yet he promptly adds that, forced to choose, he would abandon his music and keep his marriage.

But no such choice is available, and John must seek other sources of consolation and insight. Cox has filled the film's sound track (which is also John's personal sound track) with classical music, principally snippets from Gluck's *Orfeo,* the *Carmina Burana,* and Franz Sussmayr's *Grandfather's Birthday Party,* along with Ann Boyd's pointedly entitled song, "As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams." Musically, John dwells in the past; he is comically out of place in a car where rock blares and an eccentric, slouch-hatted drunk croons a bluesy ballad. His own composition sounds serenely traditional, like latter-day Gregorian chant, and Cox sometimes cuts directly from bruising marital anger to a smooth, soothing track past the rehearsing singers, who project a calmness that, in this context, feels almost otherworldly.

Gradually, we intuit that classical music matters so deeply to John in part because this "otherworldly" beauty transports him beyond what he regards as the deadening mundanity of most daily existence, transforming it into genuine life, which for him means an arena where a sense of coherent, resonant, continuous wholeness with the cosmos is possible. John never uses such grandiose language or analyzes this side of himself; nonetheless, his actions bespeak the kind of romantic for whom this notion is not merely an idealistic abstraction, to be sloughed off commonsensically as one matures and "faces reality," but a genuine grail to be pursued with all the fervor he can command.

The price this exacts is a continuous sense of disappointment with life whenever it is (as it generally is) little more than rote existence. In one affecting scene, when he accepts a night's solace with a companionably compassionate woman coworker (Anna Jemison), a new perspective suddenly opens up: perhaps John is taking his troubles too seriously; maybe, after all, he can shake off his agony and discover renewed intimacy or just some easygoing fun with another. But he rejects this opportunity grimly. John cannot, will not just take what life offers; virtually every instant must burst with some measure of perfervid intensity, or he feels naggingly dissatisfied, unsure that he is really alive.

Yet this search for intensity isolates him.

When, for example, recuperating from a suicide attempt, he has a vivid dream-recollection of a treasured instant from his and Helen's shared past (a hazy, shimmering image of dawn light on lake water) and then tries to make her share his response by describing it to her, we (and he) realize how devastatingly inadequate his words are to communicate what it means to him. When he pushes harder, pouring out a fantasy of vanishing into Helen's womb, she can only sidestep him with a deliberately banal question about lunch. Cox gives John's anguished despair its due but never glamorizes it or devalues Helen's suspicion of it. Compared to his extravagant outbursts, her casual remark to her lover when he quails at the prospect of confronting John ("You'll manage, we'll all manage, OK?") may seem coldly shallow. Yet Wendy Hughes's line readings are so alive that we can immediately sense the less gaudy but equally real passion beneath her brittle surface. She and Hargreaves (who also appear as a troubled couple in *Careful, He Might Hear You*) are a fascinating study in contrasted acting styles, she playing suppressed tension off against her elegant carriage, he bursting with bravura yet never losing steely control. *My First Wife* blends their brilliant styles with Cox's formal subtlety to keep us equally conscious of the power and the dementia in John's romanticism.

Cox's handling of John's memories is particularly mesmerizing—for instance, recurring shots of Helen fluffing out a fringe of lace on her wedding gown, Helen irradiated with pain and then ecstasy at the instant of Lucy's birth, overtly erotic glimpses of her breast and her groin, or home-movie-ish imagery of her and a younger Lucy playing on a swing, to cite just a few. Although these montages do not start until the shock of Helen's defection sinks in, Cox is preparing us for his excursions into John's dreamworld even during the movie's opening moments, with a strobic shot of flickering train windows at night under the credits. Later, with John aboard that train, Cox begins inserting another recurrent subliminal image, spidery branches blurrily twisting by outside, which along with others like it acts as a catalyst for the slipstreams of more personal images that assault John afterwards. "Assault" is the right word, for these dream montages erupt on their own, and far from offering comfort or reconciliation to his loss, they only intensify his pain.

Cox uses this device to crystallize his concern with the evanescence of meaning. I have heard some viewers criticize these images as confusing, distracting "symbolism." But they are not symbols; they are John's actual, distorted memories of moments when he felt perfectly happy—more than that, harmoniously fused with life. But, in addition, the essential point about these montages (communicated tacitly by their hectic, deliberately rough cutting style and blurry, shaky camerawork) is that they are fading, losing their power to move him, even as they play and replay obsessively in his mind. The mood they create is a desperate one, a sense of grabbing futilely at wisps of lovely past instants, out of a desperate, ridiculous yearning to recreate them somehow, or at least to preserve their full resonance. It is the direct opposite of the *mono no aware* of films like *Tokyo Story,* in which sadness at the transience of life shades at last into an acceptance of transience as an essential element of beauty. To John, however, his dreams are an unbearable reminder that he has constructed an elaborate life upon literally nothing.

For a while, the paralleling of John's struggle to regain Helen with his father's final decline seems intended to foster a heavy-handed "seize the day" slant on the material. Unaware of his son's problems, John's father even states, "In the end, the family is important . . . the family in the end is everything." In conjunction with a story John tells Helen about how his mother, while young, had an extramarital affair which kindled another brand of crazed passion in his father, this line seems to foretell a coming to terms over the old man's grave. Yet after he dies, the mood does not coalesce—by design. John's sister appears for the first time, her late arrival onscreen unobtrusively undermining the father's paean to the family. At the funeral, John tries to rise to the occasion with a wise, eloquent eulogy, but all he can produce is a threadbare invocation of his father's honesty and stature, and then a clumsily bitter quotation, "The farce is almost over." During the burial, John's mother lapses into a fit of flailing

MY FIRST WIFE: *John and his father.*

grief, despite her own memories of another love, but Cox's camera, coolly gazing from a distance, makes it look almost grotesque. And as John leaves the cemetery, hand in hand with Lucy and Helen, the camera cranes grandly upward, accompanied by music from a children's orchestra in which Lucy plays. Yet these devices leave us not with the sense of serenity that they would ordinarily communicate but with a throbbing malaise and lostness which will linger for John well beyond the last fade-out. (As Stanley Kauffman has pointed out, the movie's optimism lies entirely in its title.)

The uncompromising rigor of *My First Wife* sent me back to *Lonely Hearts* and *Man of Flowers* to reassess my initial lukewarmness toward them. *Lonely Hearts* had struck me the way it did many others—as an amusing, touching, but finally negligible "little people" movie along the lines of *Marty,* distinguishable from it mainly by its open attention to the couple's blocked sexual longings and by its darts of unpredictable, oddball humor, such as showing Peter, who has prankishly pretended to be blind while out on one of his piano tuning calls, nonchalantly get into his car after he has finished and drive away as his confused customer gapes. *Man of Flowers* seemed clearly richer and more ambitious, but it also appeared to be playing a very tricky game with borderline perversion, tiptoeing to the brink of seriously exploring it while making it in the end merely charming, even cute. But reseeing the movies in the light of *My First Wife* showed me that I was wrong about them both.

Not totally. *Lonely Hearts* still seems minor, humanely yet at last too easily sympathetic towards two small souls groping after a place in a cold world. But now it clearly possesses seeds which have germinated luxuriantly in its two successors. Foremost among them is eccentricity, which Peter Thompson (Norman Kaye) seems intended to exemplify in moments like his blind man's prank, although (and this is the film's severe limitation) he never truly develops far beyond Lonely Guyism. Like *Man of Flowers,* in which the even older, nuttier Charles (also played by Norman Kaye) writes self-addressed letters to his dead mother, *Lonely Hearts* portrays eccentricity as a trait released from timorous, repressed men during middle age when their mothers die, though neither film makes the mothers castrating, smothering dragons. Peter starts getting sprightly even during his mother's last rites, putting on a spiffy suit and a toupee which makes the top of his head, at least, look twenty years younger, then turning the cortege to the cemetery into a mini-car chase. Soon he has joined the dating club, met the skittish Patricia (Wendy Hughes), and made his own foray into art, a role in a local production of August Strindberg's *The Father,* presided over by a gleefully waspish gay director. But as we see more of Peter and Patricia (whose sexual inexperience makes her every breath an agony of mortification and fear) and meet others in their lives (her intrusive parents, his goofish brother-in-law, and his institutionalized father, among others), the thought gradually arises that Cox wants something more than a simple Australian derivative of Ealing-style fubsiness.

This feeling emerges most clearly during three scenes which, amid the whimsicality that surrounds them, seem all the more charged with incongruous pain. As Peter and Patricia, whom the director has lured into the cast of *The Father* (ironically, since her own father is her major bedevilment), run lines together in his apartment, she, still terrified of sex yet nervously fascinated as well, decrees that they will sleep together platonically. But when Peter cannot restrain himself from attempting to make love to her, the scene turns into a comic and dreadful paradigm of a disastrous first time, as he has to shoo his dachsund

away, bare ass in the air, and she loses her shaky composure and flees. Afterwards, they blend their own psychodrama with Strindberg's during a deftly written rehearsal sequence, as he pleads in vain for a reconciliation with a naked intensity that unexpectedly reveals his depth of feeling (and foretells John's naked grief in *My First Wife*). In a tailspin, he gets caught shoplifting in a mortifying way, then returns home to discover that his dog has shit on the floor. Describing these pratfalls this way must make them sound ridiculous and so they are—until Peter's sudden, welling anger leads him to a harsh denunciation of everything humiliating about life's daily, undistinguished, pathetic round. As the movie also shows (in a lighter way) during an inopportune visit by Peter's brother-in-law while Peter is trying ineffectually to negotiate with a friendly outcall hooker named Raspberry, life seldom allows us to have satisfyingly clear-cut emotions; the banal dailiness of existence will usually adulterate them; yet, bewilderingly, it can also heighten their humanity.

In *Man of Flowers,* eccentricity becomes almost tropically lush. Thanks to a large inheritance from his mother, Charles can now construct and live in his own enclosed world; the money enables him, as he tells Lisa (Alyson Best), the nude model, to "collect beauty and possess it." For him, this means, along with his elegant home, classical music, female nudity, and (above all) flowers, which he buys in lavish bouquets for himself, cultivates painstakingly, and presses into books. Nor does he separate these elements of his life; they form the substance of his sexuality, which one visualizes as a humid rainforest choked with exotic plantlife. Yet Charles looks like the very prototype of the conservative, genteel bachelor, dry as a Saltine; at times, in his dark topcoat and fedora, he eerily resembles the Buster Keaton of Samuel Beckett's *Film.*

MAN OF FLOWERS

Norman Kaye continually extracts bemusing comedy from the contrast between Charles's vestryman exterior and his calm, unfazable outrageousness. When Charles, in an art class, portrays Lisa covered with tuberous stems and blossoms despite the teacher's admonition to paint like a strict realist ("Imagination is the word people use," she says grumpily, "when they don't know what they're doing"), he threatens to "punch you in the nose and plead artistic freedom all the way to the Privy Council." Later, he stands nude in his spacious sunken bathtub matter-of-factly asking a call-in radio sexologist whether one may properly consider flowers "arouding, tender, loving beings." When a statue salesman (Patrick Cook) babbles to him about a scheme to save cemetery land by encasing corpses in copper, Charles listens soberly, and when he proposes that Lisa and her lover Jane (Sarah Walker) undress and kiss each other while he watches, all in the hope of curing his premature ejaculation, his meek, uninflected voice heightens the atmosphere of ozone-like perversity. No wonder the call-in guru, though wacko enough himself, can only gasp that Charles has "a sense of humor I do not share" and the art teacher (Julia Blake) is left staring at him in utter puzzlement and murmuring, "What a strange little person you are."

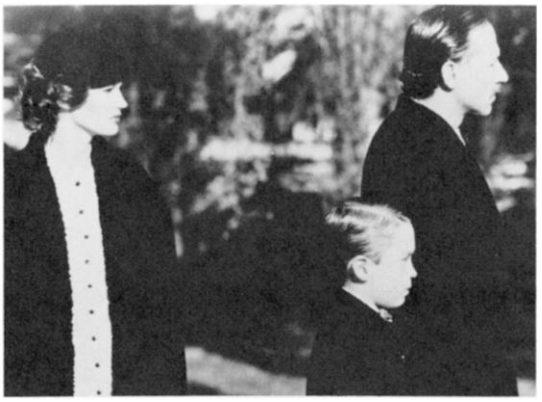
Charles moves even deeper into hothouse weirdness (a session between him and his shrink, played by the film's cowriter Bob Ellis, has them mingling manias and switching roles so fluidly that off-the-wall doesn't begin to describe it—it's off-the-planet). But Cox is not really interested, as I mistakenly thought,

MAN OF FLOWERS

in making Charles just colorfully "dotty" in some sentimental-amusing way. People like the art teacher and the call-in host may be satisfied to write him off as one more screw-loose, but others are struck to find themselves drawn to Charles. His eccentricity turns out to be remarkably liberating for them, not only because it encourages their own frozen possibilities but also because it coexists with a deep-seated kindness and tolerance, a shy eagerness to help and to understand. For instance, Charles's young mailman (Barry Dickens) can't even deliver a gas bill without reeling off a harebrained spiel about the state of the universe ("The whole world's completely fucked" is his signature line, but the cheeriness that he puts into it is elating). Most people would undoubtedly dismiss or avoid him, but Charles recognizes a kindred spirit, and when the youth blissfully prattles one day about "how far do you go in the way of compromise with obscene world around you," Charles wryly adds, "Or within you." Because Charles truly believes that "the most unexpected people have a lot of wisdom," he is always ready when that wisdom presents itself, no matter how unlikely the source.

More significantly, his influence freshens Lisa's life. Initially, she is caught in a sterile relationship with David (Chris Haywood), a formerly trendy painter who now spends all her money on nose candy. But, before that, we get to watch her strip for Charles while the "Love Duet" from *Lucia di Lammermoor* washes over her golden figure. Surely, there has never been a more liquidly sensual striptease in the history of film. Softly lit by Yuri Sokol (who in other scenes of all three films uses a very drab palette to create a context for their protagonists' bizarre behavior), Lisa is as caught up in erotic fantasy as Charles is, using this heady piece of sex-theater to tap her own banked sexuality (though Charles never touches her and even objects when she kisses his cheek once) in a way that she has no hope of doing with David. Unlike most others (including David, who comes to a comic-horrific end when he tries to blackmail Charles), she lets herself see the gentlemanly humanity behind Charles's outré facade, and this insight (which the movie leaves unstated) plainly emboldens her to dump David at last and then accept Jane's longstanding invitation to try a lesbian relationship—a development which the movie treats as an endearing blend of casualness, embarrassment, and warmth that is utterly typical of Cox's intelligent straightforwardness about all sorts of sexual encounters.

But *Man of Flowers* also shows how eccen-



MAN OF FLOWERS: *A revery scene.*

tricity traps Charles. Like John, he lives partially in a state of dreamy fixation on his past. ("Dreams take up nearly half your whole life," he muses, literally mistaken yet poetically correct.) His reveries focus on his childhood, when he was, by his own visualization, a soft, plump, unruly creature obsessed with nude statues in parks, the cleavages and bare backs of lady guests at his parents' tea parties, but most of all by his mother (Hilary Kelly) and the musk of primal nurturance and intimacy that his recollections of her still exude. Unlike John's, Charles's cherished images are not losing their power, but this power is also as frustrating as the transience of John's dreamworld. Cox had filmed these images, as he did the dream montages in *My First Wife,* with shaky pans, jagged cuts, faded smears of color, and snatches of opera in lieu of natural sound effects. The difference is that he has also made them exquisitely funny—and their most hilarious touch is undoubtedly the casting of none other than Werner Herzog as Charles's prim, skinny father, who is always pursing his lips in abhorrence of the nasty boy and twisting his ear while dragging him away after Charles has disrupted tea by brazenly staring at a lady's plush flesh or openly fondling it. (Kaye, Ellis, and Cox all worked on Herzog's Australian movie, *Where the Green Ants Dream,* whose wayward bits of Cox-like humor are its only successful feature.) I have never seen images of childhood on the screen so richly permeated with commingled memory distortion, poignantly lost deep emotion, and exhilarating lunacy, all in miraculously perfect suspension. We understand perfectly why Charles is so bewitched by them and why he writes, "My imagination frightens me."

Peter and Patricia settle down to domesticity and John remains adrift as *Lonely Hearts* and *My First Wife* end. But Charles finds an enigmatic zone of his own. After disposing of David's blackmail scheme with typically dry effrontery, then declaring that he can be a friend but not a lover to Lisa, Charles walks onto a grassy hillside, virtually a silhouette in his topcoat. Two similar figures are already there, and another enters the frame as the camera rises to disclose a vast seascape. The four shadows against the green irridescence gaze motionlessly out over the ocean for many moments, as Donizetti plays and Charles intones, "Some people are so helpless in this world, some are so alone." Clearly, Charles does not consider himself one of them, and at first this seems leadenly ironic. After all, he had earlier admitted to Lisa and Jane that "it is hard to see yourself as others see you, or to see yourself at all." But as the magical image holds and the music irradiates this dreamscape, the irony fades, and we realize that Charles is entirely right—he is anything but a lost soul.

My First Wife contains a humbler, more likely to be overlooked, yet equally moving motif. Twice, John gently adjusts Lucy's arms while she is struggling with her cello. The first time, John initially seems to be ignoring her, exactly as Helen said, working self-absorbedly at his desk while she flounders. The second time, a potentially ugly quarrel begins to flare up between him and Helen during a recital by the children's orchestra. Suddenly realizing that he might ruin the performance and embarrass his daughter, John falls silent and then glides over to her. The way he lifts her arm grants him the peace he has been so feverishly clawing after, if only for a moment—unexpectedly, mysteriously, like one of Robert Bresson's infusions of divine grace. In each case, the camera is attentive to Lucy as she accepts the correction silently and plays on. Playing on is all the peace that Cox's work thus far has to offer; at his best, however, he knows how to make it more than enough.

NOTES

Biographical and production data, as well as Paul Cox's quoted statements, come from the following:

Anthony Fabian-Reinstein, "Australian Film Industry Part V: Director Paul Cox: Busy Making Films . . . With A Little Help From His Friends," *UCLA Daily Bruin,* November 11, 1985.

Karen Jaehne, "Coming Up Roses: Director Paul Cox, Man of 'Flowers'," *The Washington Post,* July 7, 1985.

Raymond Stanley, "Cox, Hargreaves Work Together On 'My First Wife,' My Most Commercial Yet, Says Dutch-Born Director," *Screen International,* May 12, 1984.

_____, "Paul Cox," *Lonely Hearts* biographical note, Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1983.

David Stratton, "Shooting Wraps On 'Cactus,'" *Variety,* November 7, 1985.

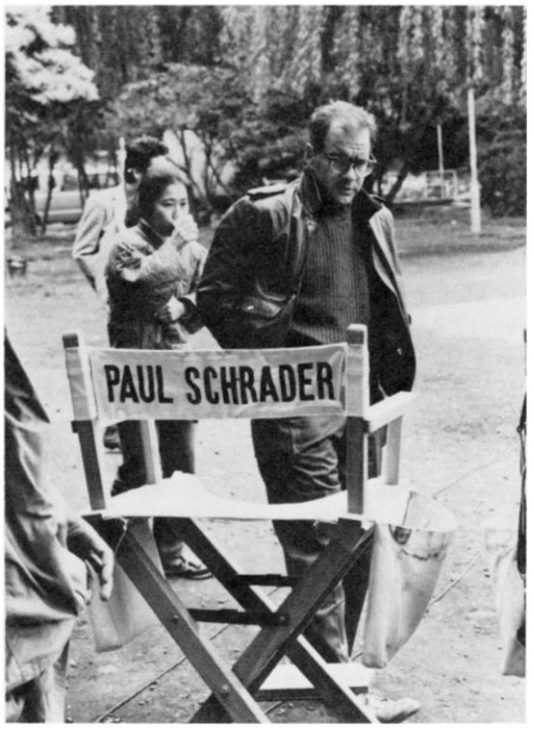
Lawrence Van Gelder, "Paul Cox's Films Explore The Inner Man," *The New York Times,* December 16, 1984.

The Samuel Goldwyn Company distributes *Lonely Hearts* in the United States. The American distributor of *Man of Flowers, My First Wife,* and *Cactus* is Spectrafilm.

KAREN JAEHNE

Schrader's *Mishima*: An Interview

For about ten years, Paul Schrader and his brother, screenwriter Leonard Schrader, have worked on a film about the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima. After producing 40 novels, 18 plays and 20 volumes of short stories and essays, Mishima committed *seppuku* (ritual suicide) in the office of the highest-ranking military officer of Japan. Mishima flaunted a self-styled samurai image, with a claimed devotion to the Emperor, but it was laced with homosexuality, despite his wife and two children. He held the allegiance of a corps of cadets he had trained to follow him around—the Shield Society. Out of such potentially controversial and colorful biographical details, the Schraders could have made a bot-boiler that would have titillated the world.



Leonard Schrader lived and studied and married in Japan; Paul Schrader knew Japan fairly well from his study of Japanese cinema and his first screenwriting credit for *The Yakuza* (1975). Their interest in Mishima led them into long negotiations with Mishima's widow and with his literary executor, a Korean named Shiragi. Ultimately, they created not the simmering, gay-bashing bio-pic the world had expected but rather a coolly modernistic and abstract study of Mishima's life reflected through his literary interests—manifested in slices of drama drawn and condensed from three novels that were not put off limits by Mishima's family (who were censoring all the salaciously appealing aspects of his life). *The Temple of the Golden Pavillion* (1956) set up the "chapter" in the film entitled "Beauty," in which beauty becomes the hero's enemy. From *Kyoko's House* (1959) came the chapter "Art," in which a debilitating sadomasochistic relationship rises out of economic necessity. *Runaway Horses* (1969) yielded "Action," about a fiery young would-be assassin intent on striking a blow against capitalism. Finally, in "The Harmony of Pen and Sword," Schra-

NOTES

Biographical and production data, as well as Paul Cox's quoted statements, come from the following:

Anthony Fabian-Reinstein, "Australian Film Industry Part V: Director Paul Cox: Busy Making Films . . . With A Little Help From His Friends," *UCLA Daily Bruin,* November 11, 1985.

Karen Jaehne, "Coming Up Roses: Director Paul Cox, Man of 'Flowers'," *The Washington Post,* July 7, 1985.

Raymond Stanley, "Cox, Hargreaves Work Together On 'My First Wife,' My Most Commercial Yet, Says Dutch-Born Director," *Screen International,* May 12, 1984.

_____, "Paul Cox," *Lonely Hearts* biographical note, Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1983.

David Stratton, "Shooting Wraps On 'Cactus,'" *Variety,* November 7, 1985.

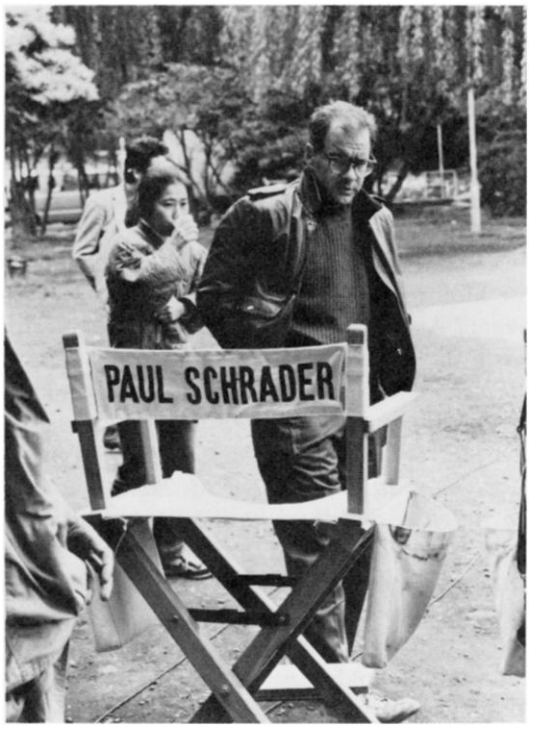
Lawrence Van Gelder, "Paul Cox's Films Explore The Inner Man," *The New York Times,* December 16, 1984.

The Samuel Goldwyn Company distributes *Lonely Hearts* in the United States. The American distributor of *Man of Flowers, My First Wife,* and *Cactus* is Spectrafilm.

KAREN JAEHNE

Schrader's *Mishima*: An Interview

For about ten years, Paul Schrader and his brother, screenwriter Leonard Schrader, have worked on a film about the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima. After producing 40 novels, 18 plays and 20 volumes of short stories and essays, Mishima committed *seppuku* (ritual suicide) in the office of the highest-ranking military officer of Japan. Mishima flaunted a self-styled samurai image, with a claimed devotion to the Emperor, but it was laced with homosexuality, despite his wife and two children. He held the allegiance of a corps of cadets he had trained to follow him around—the Shield Society. Out of such potentially controversial and colorful biographical details, the Schraders could have made a bot-boiler that would have titillated the world.



Leonard Schrader lived and studied and married in Japan; Paul Schrader knew Japan fairly well from his study of Japanese cinema and his first screenwriting credit for *The Yakuza* (1975). Their interest in Mishima led them into long negotiations with Mishima's widow and with his literary executor, a Korean named Shiragi. Ultimately, they created not the simmering, gay-bashing bio-pic the world had expected but rather a coolly modernistic and abstract study of Mishima's life reflected through his literary interests—manifested in slices of drama drawn and condensed from three novels that were not put off limits by Mishima's family (who were censoring all the salaciously appealing aspects of his life). *The Temple of the Golden Pavillion* (1956) set up the "chapter" in the film entitled "Beauty," in which beauty becomes the hero's enemy. From *Kyoko's House* (1959) came the chapter "Art," in which a debilitating sadomasochistic relationship rises out of economic necessity. *Runaway Horses* (1969) yielded "Action," about a fiery young would-be assassin intent on striking a blow against capitalism. Finally, in "The Harmony of Pen and Sword," Schra-

der ties up all the conclusions to the previous chapters along with Mishima's kamikaze mission to exhort the troops ending in his *seppuku*—an apotheosis of creative carnage. In the following interview, Schrader discusses many of the problems of making the film, his own conception of Mishima, and Japan's problem with the man.

●

What was the source of your interest in Yukio Mishima?

The entire world knew of his death. It struck people interested in Japan, in particular, because he was possibly the most important or accessible Japanese writer, and because he chose such a flamboyant death. But beyond the overt theatrical nature of his death—and life—he is an example of a certain pathology of suicidal glory that transcends education and culture. When *Taxi Driver* came out, somebody accused me of inflating the heroic impulse of an ignorant kid with a penchant for violence, and I responded in some attempt at an intellectual justification of what I had written—which I might add I'm less inclined to do anymore. In the process, I mentioned Yukio Mishima as an example of such a pathology, despite his intellect and education and higher motivations.

There was a lawsuit filed by Mishima's biographer, Henry Scott Stokes, wasn't there? Concerning overlaps between the film and his book?

This suit has now been withdrawn. Nuisance cases of this sort are not uncommon. Stokes has the mistaken idea that the world would not have known anything about Mishima but for Stokes's book, which states very clearly that he did no original research. He is claiming that I derived my film from his book, although we did do a lot of original research. We went into the trial records, where all the material about Mishima's final day can be found, and those trial records were not even available or open to Stokes when he published his book. There are lots of mistakes in his book because he only worked from his memory of the trial. We also interviewed a number of people whom he had not interviewed. And we had access to every bit of published material that he had, so a certain amount of verifiable data was available to us both.

Would you comment on the critical reactions to the film?

Well, critics are always crying, "Give me something new. We never see anything innovative." Then you do something they've never seen the likes of before, and they howl "What is it?" They refuse to take the time to understand the developments you're proposing. You say I didn't give them a lot of room with this film: you said "It's either a masterpiece, or it isn't," right? The critic decides to side either with the art form and my innovations (providing we modestly pull back from the term "masterpiece"), or he decides to go with his constituency who buy newspapers to have things confirmed that they basically already know. Where's the critic who's up to making this film or other so-called difficult films accessible to his readership? Is he leading taste or hiding behind what he thinks his readers want? And how does he know? Popular criticism in this country, like everything else, is becoming extremely conservative, or just lazy.

Were you ever afraid of also being seen as part of the shift to the right, simply from the choice of subject matter? Mishima is a military figure, and there have been several films this year alone about solitary, romanticized militarists. How did the Japanese right wing react to your taking on their cult figure?

Mishima was not really a militarist. I consider him a soldier *manqué*. And no, I think that in conservative times, you have to analyze conservative phenomena and take a critical

approach, just as you would to phony liberalism. I'm a bit tired of drubbing phony liberals. Perhaps I and other directors are focusing on the militaristic kind of personality. The right wing in Japan is not just a wing; it's the whole house, and, I admit, they do seem to dislike us. The only way I could cope with all the pressures was to ignore them all. Besides, this is not really a political movie. To analyze Japan in any political sense would require a film much different from *Mishima,* which is about Mishima's artistic life more than anything, or at least the sources of his style.

What is keeping the film from being shown in Japan?

You mean besides their outrage and embarrassment at people knowing that Mishima was Japanese? In our case, they couldn't stop the film being made, because we set about it in an extraordinarily independent and unpredictable fashion. The Japanese producer Mata Yamamoto managed to get away with his end of it, basically because the Japanese film industry is so confused and impotent that they couldn't block us in the way, for example, an association of producers or distributors or studios can in other countries. Of course, for the longest time Toho and Fuji Television insisted that they had no interest in it. They were not about to admit to their viewers that they were part of the betrayal, but I think they are planning on releasing it and making a killing over the controversy.

What must be realized is the way the government has managed to control the right-wing agitators against the film. After a group of them once descended on Yamamoto's house in the suburbs to demonstrate, they were confronted by a horde of policemen—which meant to them that the government was monitoring the house and was not letting anything happen. In short, even though the government didn't like the idea of this film, they were not going to let an incident take place that would prove even more embarrassing.

When Mishima took over General Masuda's office at the time of his suicide, it should have been Nakasone [now Prime Minister] in that office, because he was head of the Department of Defense at the time and just happened to be away on some other matter. Nakasone had approved Mishima's use of military property, got permission for him to carry weapons,

MISHIMA: *"Beauty"*

to lead his troupe around and so forth. Obviously, Mishima must have been a terrible embarrassment to him, when he returned to the office. In fact, Mishima's name is not uttered in the halls of the Nakasone government. The upshot is that although they don't want to hear his name in a film title, neither do they want to hear it in an outcry over a film. It helped us in a way—Mishima being such an anathema.

Some of your critics have claimed that you were particularly helped by the fact that the Japanese are stone-deaf and dumb on the subject of Mishima, and that therefore you could get away with the approach you took, which is very stylized and full of pretense, if you will.

Yes, but pretense in the best sense of the word. The film really "pretends" to be about something. It's not coy. It states up front that this is going to be an intellectual and individualistic enterprise. It's quite the opposite of art pretending to be just entertainment. It makes no bones about its aims.

Did you ever think it was possible to make a straight bio-pic?

No. Such a film would be uninteresting. The bio-pic is now in the province of television. You have to have an original approach if you try to do a biography. I'm working on a Gershwin script right now. His life was relatively devoid of drama, so I had to restructure time and escape from the chronological

drama, which was also my intention for *Mishima*. Of course, the Gershwin script is much more popular and accessible. Gershwin was a straightforward man; Mishima was infuriatingly contradictory. By the time he could understand anything he was interested in, he had already written or said the opposite, so his entire work and his life remain a conundrum. Part of the fun of cracking such a life is fitting his puzzle into your solution. Mishima was the problem, but the solution is admittedly mine. It does not propose to be the last word on Yukio Mishima; it just opens a lot of doors.

Which Mishima's widow preferred to keep shut?

The problems with Mishima's widow boil down to her conception of him as a kind of Japanese Visconti. Even though I tried to point out that Visconti was old and revered and Mishima was young and, at best, controversial when he died, she clings to this idea of the enshrined poet. Any aspect that rips the veil of respectability and challenges the standards of decorum set off her anxieties about his memory being insulted. That includes Mishima's wallowing in blood and death, his pseudo-politics, homosexuality, etc.

After hearing that you had not been allowed to touch the homosexual aspect of Mishima, many of us were surprised to see how much homosexuality was indeed in the picture.

Most critics seem to complain about the opposite. Many seemed to want me to make a very different film. I don't believe you have to show men in bed to discuss homosexuality. Lust is truly more challenging to figure out visually than sex.

Dick Cavett said something interesting on the air: this was a film that had created a lot of instant authorities—authorities on Japan, on homosexuality, on military aesthetics, Japanese politics, East-West relationships, Mishima's politics. I spent so long preparing this picture that I feel a certain confidence in knowing something about it. I also trust that my brother, who has lived and studied in Japan for a long time, knows more than a lot of journalists who seem only to have brushed up and rushed into print, most of them without interviewing us or even clarifying in their own heads what was, in fact, in ours.

I think you have a very interesting insight into the narcissism of the military, the fascination with uniforms and paraphernalia, ribbons and stripes and gew-gaws that constitute a Kabuki style of make-up of the basic uniformed body.

Well, one of the ways you can define narcissism is the constant search for a reflection of the body in the form you most desire to project upon it. For men steeped in a military tradition, a glorious uniform is the ultimate crown of beauty. I've always been interested in the character trying to get out of the strictures of physicality, whether that means through art or religion or sex. The idea that the body is a limitation to be overcome, through whatever means you can master, is inherent in my upbringing. Within the struggle for that transcendence, a metamorphosis of the body goes on, as one tries to transform the body into something it can never be. The escape from the body becomes an obsessive devotion to it, which is really the discovery of something through its opposite. Narcissism is simply an extension of hatred of the body.

You show that extension from Mishima's psychological obsession with his own sexuality and body towards a form of action, particularly embodied in the corps of followers he trained for the Shield Society. Was the Shield Society an end or a means toward a political end?

The Shield Society was an expression of "Mishima-think" rather than a political body, which is why it disbanded after his death. It was a headless horseman, just as he was headless, after his death, because they had no real principles other than his homoerotic and artistic grandiosity. I was concerned with the progression from Mishima's admiration for images of metaphysical suffering like St. Sebastian's to the actual physical training that would perfect Mishima's own body and put it to a test that, of course, he alone could divine. The Shield Society with its ostensible social-religious-militaristic purpose, accomplished none of those objectives.

How did the Emperor figure into their "devotion"? It turned out to be a devotion to Mishima, didn't it?

That's a big question. Mishima did finally touch upon the ultimate taboo—the Emperor. Because the Emperor was above politics,

above the entire scope of what became Japanese pragmatism (which they were forced into, creating an almost schizophrenic society after the war), Mishima's elevating himself to the dubious role of the Emperor's guardian and advocate made everybody very uncomfortable. What might have been tolerated within the samurai tradition was no longer feasible in Mishima's lifetime, because Japan was distancing itself so rapidly from its own traditions.

There are a lot of people who have intelligent things to say about Mishima's relationship to the Emperor, in comparison to Japanese society's attitude toward their Emperor, but I'm not one of them, at least not now. That would have demanded a different kind of film, a different angle on Mishima's psychology. I'm more interested in the influence and effects of his fascination with the West and how that affected his return to his own concept of Japanese destiny.

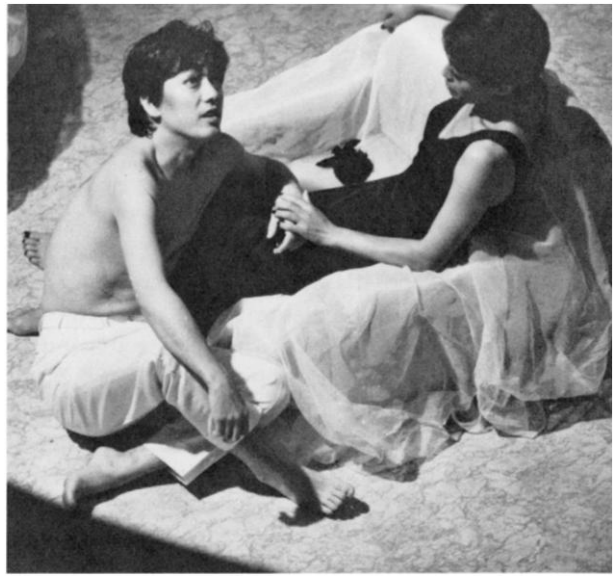
Was he a fascist?

His was a social rebellion with a suicidal impulse, but it did not kill itself, as it does in kids who wear swastikas and safety pins through their cheeks, by donning Brooks Brothers suits. Mishima and his corps of cadets were not fascists. They were some form of sexual-artistic surrogates, and Mishima deserves, in a way, a lot of the misinterpretation he's received, because he chose sartorial metaphors.

He wrote a play called *My Friend Hitler,* and he must have known he would be lambasted for it. And when he designed those uniforms, he must have known that people would misconstrue this as a form of Third Reichism. Maybe that delighted him. But that still does not detract from the fact that his politics were a mass of balderdash. You can't make any sense of them, but they have no relationship to fascism.

What was the point of his appearance at the Tokyo University rally in 1968?

That was a turning point. He had been gearing up for death his whole life and he'd talked about it so long that people were bored with listening. Japan has a sort of tradition of suicidal authors—the list is seven or eight strong, by my count, and there could be more. Mishima was moving down this path at such a rate, he realized that he could easily become just another Japanese writer who killed himself. He chose to avoid that by exposing himself.



MISHIMA: *"Kyoto's House"*

When the students at Tokyo University reached their pinnacle of power in 1968, they were on the front page every day. When they invited him to speak, he was excited. He'd had a lot of publicity, but he'd never been front-page stuff. If you want the front page, of course, you have to get into politics. Although he had given an interview a year previously in which he had said, "I have no politics"—and I believe he was being honest—at that point he saw it as a way to extend his fantasies. He could increase his literary stock and become an international star. It was a matter of style, not belief or substance. Susan Sontag defined this style in her essay "Fascinating Fascism." Maybe the need to appropriate others' fascist paraphernalia occurs with many obsessives; but in the case of Mishima-the-Artist, he was intent on *designing* all symbols, medals and expressions of the Corps. What he created, however, was not necessarily original.

Do you see any relationship between your film about a homosexual in hot pursuit of a uniform and two other pictures also shown at Cannes, Adieu, Bonaparte *by Yussef Chahine and* Colonel Redl *by Istvan Szábo, both of which deal with homosexual military officers?*

No, but I see the coincidence and agree that it is odd. Perhaps we're getting closer to defining the fascist personality, but I think it's also important to distinguish between the fashion and the fascism. Possibly it's the homosexuality in such men that cuts both ways—reflects

fascistic impulses but also keeps them away from totally straight-jacketed fascism. The military is homoerotic as hell; the dedication of firm bodies to a higher principle? Of course, but there's also a heterosexual impulse that—well, maybe it's just reproductive and not erotic. There's a heterosexual allure of fascism, too, possibly in the phallic tension of the uniform and helmet and all, but I don't know. Whatever appeal it has in whatever directions, its service to the ultimate reality of death is probably what separates it from truly heterosexual, nurturing, humanistic motivations.

There's a fairly obvious transition in the opening sequence from Mishima in a Liberace sort of dressing gown on his terrace to the painstaking adornment of his body with a fastidiously laid out uniform in preparation for his death. Was that a comment on uniforms as kitsch or meant as a contrast?

I put that up front for a fairly practical reason. I knew the film was going to be difficult, and I wanted something up there that people could "get" so they would know later, when it did get tougher, that I was not being obtuse for the sake of making them scratch their heads.

Have you run into the accusation of being sushi-chic?

What does that mean?

Yuppie Japanese streamlined aesthetics—sushi, kimono sleeves, red and black enamel, Zen and the art of high-tech repair.

(laughs) The film is chock-a-block with difficult concepts—not mine, Mishima's—and I hope it doesn't glide out like sashimi slices. Mishima himself lived in a style that was as far from Zen as anything I can think of. He had some very peculiar ideas, a few of which I address. Perhaps by predisposition, I was interested in the idea that as an object becomes more and more beautiful, it seeks its own destruction. Also intriguing is the idea that one must not only be a see-er, one must also be seen while one sees. They are rarified, obscure but artistic ideas and the film goes right to the heart of them. There's no way you can talk about such things and make it an easy watch.

Some people find the chapter titles pretentious, but they were only meant to be helpful.

Ken Ogata as Mishima.

I found, when I first screened it, that when I didn't put the titles on, people didn't understand what the point was. So I give an entire table of contents to the movie at the beginning. I don't think it's ever been done before. The fact that you see the list and know what's happening makes the list a handbook for watching this kind of film.

How do you react to accusations of high art?

I know it really raises the hackles of critics to be expected to respond to high art, when they would prefer to discover something artistic in material with no claim on artistic values. Just as Mishima knew that people were going to get pissed off at him, he would make the ultimate statement of all art in Japan. He chose to exclude himself and to stand alone. He knew that he was cutting himself out of society, and simultaneously out of life.

There's a famous line about Japan: "In the West, we believe that hell is other people. In Japan, they believe heaven is other people."

Is this your affinity with Mishima—as an outcast-in-progress?

I did know that by taking such an aggressively intellectual stance, I would cut myself off from a large part of the critical community. Of course, the American film critical community is nothing like Japan, where the family is the dominant group. Here democracy reigns—everybody gets an opinion. In

Japan, a play democracy is at work, but not as a democracy, rather as a family. That was also what made the film so much fun to make. It bred an *esprit de corps* in the crew. Everybody on the crew was excited about making a film that was equally Japanese and American. Since that was such a satisfaction in the production process, it's difficult to take seriously the criticisms you hear about the film being not Japanese enough or too American to understand the Japanese ethos or some such thing. I like to think of it as the Nissan of films.

Do you think the Japanese have some privileged insight into Mishima? I talked to Toshiro Mifune and asked him about the personality involved, since he quickly assured me he'd never seen the picture and was very uncomfortable discussing the character of Mishima, which he then went on to say hovered on a borderline between genius and madness. Why such nervous conclusions?

The Japanese have a mistaken idea that we don't understand Mishima because we're not Japanese. As it works out, they may understand him less than we do, because they feel they should understand him and become paralyzed over their failure to fathom what was going on in his life. They refuse to think about him. We know we can't know the whole picture, so we treat it as a complex conundrum and see how much of it we might be able to understand with no preconceptions about where he should fit in. It's an essential part of the Japanese character to believe that no non-Japanese can understand a Japanese. Most Japanese who believe otherwise tend to end up living abroad.

Only fifty years ago, they assumed that unless you were born Japanese, you couldn't even begin to speak their language because it was so difficult. Their word for foreigner, *gaijin,* is not a flattering term; it's something like *goyim,* but means "not us." The idea that an outsider would try to do what they can't is infuriating. The Japanese not only don't want Mishima; an even greater fear is that the *gaijin* will appropriate him.

Do you feel a special affinity to Mishima?

After all this, I'd have to, but I've also developed a distance that keeps me from thinking of him as a hero. He was an extraordinarily creative and simultaneously destructive personality.

LEO BRAUDY

The Sacraments of Genre: Coppola, DePalma, Scorsese

"An aesthetic of reality," André Bazin called the Italian neorealist films of the immediate postwar period, and the description has stuck. Whatever the changes in style and approach that directors like Rossellini, DeSica, Antonioni, and Fellini made later in their careers, there is still a critical tendency to root them in a film-making that stayed close to the stuff of everyday life. By respecting the integrity of the actors and objects within its gaze, it sought not to turn them into something thematic or symbolic, but to maintain their separateness and their unalloyed reality—if we take "reality" to mean that which is constantly evading our final interpretation and our subordination of it to our interpretive systems.

The now-aging younger generation of Italian-American film-makers—in which I include Francis Ford Coppola, Brian DePalma, and Martin Scorsese—at first glance could be hardly more different from the generation of neorealists in their style and preoccupations.

Japan, a play democracy is at work, but not as a democracy, rather as a family. That was also what made the film so much fun to make. It bred an *esprit de corps* in the crew. Everybody on the crew was excited about making a film that was equally Japanese and American. Since that was such a satisfaction in the production process, it's difficult to take seriously the criticisms you hear about the film being not Japanese enough or too American to understand the Japanese ethos or some such thing. I like to think of it as the Nissan of films.

Do you think the Japanese have some privileged insight into Mishima? I talked to Toshiro Mifune and asked him about the personality involved, since he quickly assured me he'd never seen the picture and was very uncomfortable discussing the character of Mishima, which he then went on to say hovered on a borderline between genius and madness. Why such nervous conclusions?

The Japanese have a mistaken idea that we don't understand Mishima because we're not Japanese. As it works out, they may understand him less than we do, because they feel they should understand him and become paralyzed over their failure to fathom what was going on in his life. They refuse to think about him. We know we can't know the whole picture, so we treat it as a complex conundrum and see how much of it we might be able to understand with no preconceptions about where he should fit in. It's an essential part of the Japanese character to believe that no non-Japanese can understand a Japanese. Most Japanese who believe otherwise tend to end up living abroad.

Only fifty years ago, they assumed that unless you were born Japanese, you couldn't even begin to speak their language because it was so difficult. Their word for foreigner, *gaijin,* is not a flattering term; it's something like *goyim,* but means "not us." The idea that an outsider would try to do what they can't is infuriating. The Japanese not only don't want Mishima; an even greater fear is that the *gaijin* will appropriate him.

Do you feel a special affinity to Mishima?

After all this, I'd have to, but I've also developed a distance that keeps me from thinking of him as a hero. He was an extraordinarily creative and simultaneously destructive personality.

LEO BRAUDY

The Sacraments of Genre: Coppola, DePalma, Scorsese

"An aesthetic of reality," André Bazin called the Italian neorealist films of the immediate postwar period, and the description has stuck. Whatever the changes in style and approach that directors like Rossellini, DeSica, Antonioni, and Fellini made later in their careers, there is still a critical tendency to root them in a film-making that stayed close to the stuff of everyday life. By respecting the integrity of the actors and objects within its gaze, it sought not to turn them into something thematic or symbolic, but to maintain their separateness and their unalloyed reality—if we take "reality" to mean that which is constantly evading our final interpretation and our subordination of it to our interpretive systems.

The now-aging younger generation of Italian-American film-makers—in which I include Francis Ford Coppola, Brian DePalma, and Martin Scorsese—at first glance could be hardly more different from the generation of neorealists in their style and preoccupations.

Most striking is their commitment to genre formats in plot and style, an indication of their rootedness in an American rather than an European tradition of film-making. Genre has always been the prime seedbed of American films. The neorealists and the European school in general, with the great exceptions of the early works of the French New Wave and the more recent New German cinema, have usually treated the individual film as a work situated in the history of art, or in the eternity of nature, while even in the most ambitious as well as the most perfunctory American films it is the pressure of the history of film displayed in genre form that has been the most crucial factor. Neorealism particularly, at least in Bazin's account of it, is explicitly presented as a statement of freedom against the stylization associated with expressionist film (as part of an attack on German politics and Nazism as well). This kind of film, Bazin virtually argues, exhibits the "true" aesthetic of the medium, while the stylized sets, directorial control, broad-gesture acting, and melodramatic plots of film expressionism are a falsification of its essential nature.[1]

In such an argument, the films of Coppola, DePalma, and Scorsese, with exceptions I'll note later, almost entirely wind up on the side of the tradition that Bazin believes neorealism is attacking. They are fascinated with artifice —with genre plots, characters, and motifs that delve into the roots of popular forms— as well as with stylized sets, lighting, and an expressionist use of color that convey the emotions of the characters and the situations rather than the "reality" of the objects. In contrast to the neorealist and Soviet use of nonprofessional actors to energize the film with a "realistic" sense of character, these directors focus on both the self-stylized character and the character whose psyche film and popular culture has taken over—characters for whom all experience must be mediated by the shapes of film artifice. Instead of imitating the dynamic reticence of the ideal neorealist director, who lets reality unfold before his camera, these directors are drawn to the implications of directorial imposition and tyranny: the director as aesthetic master of his material, shaping it to his will. Rather than Renoir or Rossellini, Antonioni or DeSica, their heroes are the great independent stylists: Welles for Coppola, Hitchcock for DePalma, while Scorsese invokes the eccentric combination of Michael Powell and Sam Fuller.

Yet of course the neorealist ideal against which I am measuring the deviations of this trio of Italian-American directors who have become so prominent in the seventies and eighties is itself a myth. If there ever was a neorealist consensus, it was in the eye of the wishful-thinking observer Bazin. The operatic structures of Visconti and the directorial flamboyance of Fellini obviously also play paterfamilias to *The Godfather* and *New York, New York,* where realism is heightened rather than negated. Similarly, Bazin's too easy equation of neorealism and liberation on the one hand and totalitarianism and expressionist distortion on the other is belied by the fact that so many of the directors who came to prominence after World War II received their technical training and a certain amount of their aesthetic underpinning in Mussolini's documentary film office.[2] In fact, the neorealist commitment to "an aesthetic of reality" was never so wholeheartedly polemical as Bazin argues. Rossellini is of course considered to be the one who strayed least from the fold, descending into neither Felliniesque bravura, Viscontian theatricality nor Antonionian modernism. But from the first Rossellini himself problematized the "reality" he was observing with calculatedly stylized effects. I mention just one example here: the torture scene in *Open City,* set in a room that, with total spatial illogic and psychic logic, is right next door to the main office of the Nazi chief as well as to the clubroom of his dissipated pleasures. Such a juxtaposition creates a rift in the documentary discourse (with its assumption that what is observed is truly happening) and makes us aware instead of the perceptual variations on "reality" through which the film is constructed. It is an incantatory moment, a mode of suprarealistic perception that I would like to call a sacramentalizing of the real, not so that it be worshipped but so that its spiritual essence, whether diabolical or holy, inflect what is otherwise a discrete collection of objects in space. Such a moment in Rossellini's early films connects them with preoccupations that appear with more elabo-

ration later, for example, in his analysis of the signs of material status in *The Rise of Louis XIV,* or the signs of personal self-definition in such seemingly different films as *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* and *General Della Rovere.* The commerce between such moments of psychological or expressionist eruption and their surrounding documentary format can suggest as well a closer lineage between, say, Rossellini's generation of neorealists and the mingling of documentary and expressionism in Scorsese (*Raging Bull, King of Comedy*) as well as the historical melodrama of Coppola's *Godfather.*

But my purpose here is less to argue (except by suggestion) the links to an older generation of Italian film-makers than to explore the different ways Coppola, DePalma, and Scorsese adapt to the special situation of the American film what I would like metaphorically to call a Catholic way of regarding the visible world. In varying biographical degrees, they come to film, I would argue, with a specially honed sense of (1) the importance of ritual narratives, (2) the significance of ritual objects, and (3) the conferral of ritual status. Unlike the Protestant (and often Jewish) denigration of visual materiality in favor of verbal mystery, such directors mine the transcendental potential within the visual world. Objects, people, places, and stories are irradiated by the meaning from within, which as directors they seek to unlock. Sometimes the meaning, as in the work of another Catholic director, Hitchcock, is beyond the visual. But it is still linked to an effort to make visual style a mode of moral exploration, an almost priestly urge to re-educate the audience in the timelessness of ritual stories, along with the attitudes necessary for their reinterpretations.

This process takes place, as I have said, within an American film context that has always stressed the armature of genre and of film history as the presupposition of every film. It is an aesthetic approach enhanced of course by the long-lived existence of a studio system. But even with the end of the studio system (or especially with its end), we find professed anti-Hollywoodians like Coppola and DePalma seeking to set up their own version of Hollywood and in essence beating Hollywood at its own genre game. All three

Documentary expressionism: RAGING BULL.

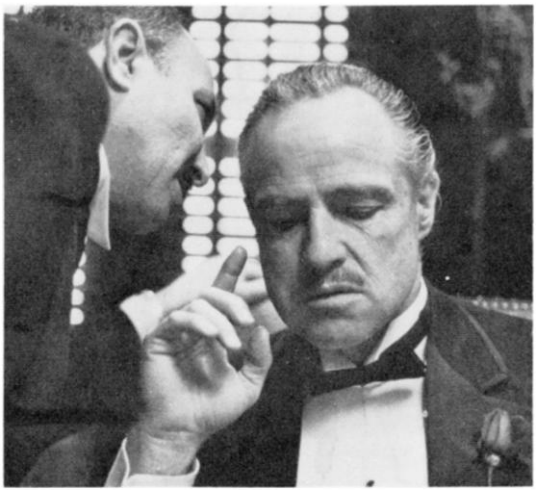
of them, along with most other American film-makers of their generation, received their technical training at the same time that the *auteur* theory of film was a force of radical upending of the official system of value. "No more European films of the grand style and no more Hollywood films of pretension" was the battlecry. The great American director would be defined instead as a man of personal style and vision, often working in the lowliest ranks of the studio, turning out masterpieces of tension between studio demands and personal urge. "Art" here was not the grand assertion of the European artist with his tradition of craft and guild connection on the one side and masterpieces and originality on the other. *Auteur* "art" came instead from a subversive use of the paraphernalia of studio complacency to articulate a personal vision.

All three of these directors did some or a good deal of their journeyman work with that institutionalized representative of the Hollywood anti-system, Roger Corman, whose stock in trade was taking marginal film genres like horror or the biker films and mixing them into an almost surreal concoction of flash and action. In the midst of Hollywood, Corman represented a knowing "bad taste" that simultaneously mocked Hollywood's own upscale

liberal pieties even while it studiously learned all its techniques. Corman produced Coppola's first film *Dementia 13,* Scorsese's first substantial feature, *Box Car Bertha,* and released DePalma's *Sisters;* he also offered a place where talented film-school graduates like George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Jonathan Demme could learn their craft at low pay. The previous Hollywood generations of directors had come from live television (Lumet, Frankenheimer, Penn) or filmed television (Altman, Pollack) with its symbiotic relation to New York theater (especially in the days of the blacklist). This new generation came out of the film schools—USC, UCLA, and NYU. If the California contingent of Lucas, Spielberg, and Coppola were more oriented to Hollywood genres and studio expertise, it came in part naturally from the prejudices of their instruction, which stressed the need to fit in, if not with the Hollywood system, then with the Hollywood way of doing things—melodramatic plots and technically advanced visual style. If the New York contingent of DePalma and Scorsese was more dubious about the ultimate uses of technical expertise and often included a questioning of their own precedures, it came naturally from their nurturing in the *cinéma vérité* documentary world of New York in the fifties and sixties, with its constant arguments over the nature of cinematic truth and its New Wave city-film ambience of street-theater strutting.

But I must return from this entire generation of new directors to Coppola, DePalma, and Scorsese in particular because I believe their Catholic upbringing, literally or metaphorically, makes them the most salient filmmakers of that group, heightening a self-consciousness about all aspects of film-making that is already inherent in the historical-aesthetic moment in which these young directors began to work. Each of the three emphasizes a different aspect of film self-consciousness as his own. In Coppola it is the sense of genre, which for him is attached to a feeling for family situations and family betrayals, much as the latest genre examples turn against the past in the name of bringing that past to some higher perfection. Genre for Coppola is like the rituals of religion. But in the family context those rituals are poisoned by the shadows of death and ambition, just as the christening of Michael Corleone's child in *Godfather II* is intercut with the bloodbath wave of assassinations he has ordered. The old must die so that the young can move into their places, as Brando, sinking into the garden while making faces, gives way to Pacino and DeNiro, his inheritors and his younger selves. Fred Astaire in Coppola's *Finian's Rainbow* may still spryly head off across the fields, but his day is clearly over, and like Martin Sheen contemplating Brando's Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now,* it seems easier to kill him off than to fathom his meaning. In *Godfather II* Michael the inheritor is a cold avenger, whose sword turns finally upon those he has vowed to preserve. Hymie Roth, the old Jewish gangster, may be defeated, but by the end the family has disappeared as well and Michael sits alone, while the lost voices of Sonny and Fredo and Kay echo in the empty room.

I have been recounting those elements in Coppola's films that lend themselves to an allegorical reading of his own relation to Hollywood and his past masters: a deep homage along with a simultaneous effort to replace them with his own aesthetic family—his father the composer, his sister the actress, and of course all his friends and coworkers at the (now defunct) American Zoetrope. Always there is a dream of camaraderie, and invariably that dream turns sour, often with a sentimental heaviness, for example in *The Outsiders,* where the bad boy Matt Dillon maintains his friendship with the younger boys to the point of sacrificing himself in a needless theatrical gesture. Much more than either Scorsese or DePalma, Coppola is committed to storytelling and narrative of an older sort, in accord with his commitment to genre and family ritual as structures of feeling that he wishes would still retain their ability to compel belief. But Coppola's commitment is undermined by his general unwillingness to question his own role as the director and *Wunderkind* who will pull all this together and make it work. Orson Welles is his progenitor and Wellesian control is really his ideal. But he lacks Welles's self-critical fascination with theatrical windbags and greedy fakes. In *God-Father II* Michael Corleone has clearly lost all the vitality of the past even as he has super-



Marlon Brando as the Godfather.

seded it in efficiency and ruthlessness. Like Coppola's own grand projects that never quite work out—*Apocalypse Now* and *One from the Heart*—the recreation of past stories in order to squeeze them of all their possible meaning never quite gets to the core that gives them life. Too often they remain only stories, and even at his best Coppola is more a virtuoso stager of their gestures than an expounder of their meanings. *Finian's Rainbow* effectively ends one major musical tradition in film; *Godfather II* systematically dismembers and calls into question every feeling and value that animated *Godfather I; Apocalypse Now* attempts to say the final word on the whole history of European and American colonialism; *The Outsiders* will be the ultimate "bad kids are really good kids" movie, etc., etc. Instead of being energized by his self-consciousness, Coppola too often is swamped by it. His detachment from his tradition leads not to analysis so much as to compendium.

The only film that Coppola made for the short-lived Director's Company (made up of himself, Peter Bogdanovich, and William Friedkin) is *The Conversation,* a smaller film than most of his, and one that intriguingly situates Coppola in relation to the earlier generation of Italian directors, as well as to Brian DePalma. Even though, as it has often been noted, *The Conversation* owes an enormous amount to the editing and constructive skills of Walter Murch, I will treat it as connected to Coppola's own interests because, as Michael Pye and Linda Myles point out, it proceeds directly out of an intellectual context at Zoetrope where Antonioni's *Blow-up* was constantly being discussed as a key to all the most intriguing questions about the film-making process and the meaning of film that the young film-makers were setting about to explore.[3]

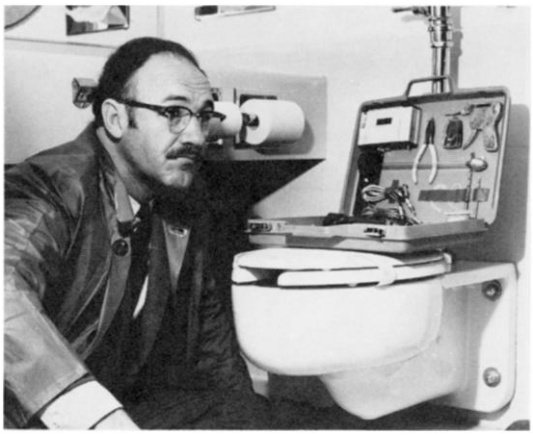
Blow-up was more appealing to the self-conscious young film-makers than any of Antonioni's earlier films because its theme is specifically the problematics of vision, particularly as seeing is mediated by the camera. Within a mystery plot featuring a Hitchcock-style innocent bystander who catches a glimpse of a crime, Antonioni explores similarly Hitchcockian themes of moral entrapment, in which the bystander becomes culpable through his particular way of seeing and interpreting the world. Like those of Scotty in *Rear Window,* the flaws of Antonioni's Thomas come specifically from the impulses that animate his career as a photographer. Moodily alienated from fashion photography, in which he is clearly the master over fawning, posturing women, he seeks some moral exoneration by frequenting flophouses and surreptitiously taking pictures of the bums and outcasts who are their inhabitants. By this ambiguous penance he delves into what he considers to be the "truth" of life. And he shows the photos to his agent as part of plans for a new book that will supposedly allow him to be seen as a "serious" photographer.

With his unquestioned commitment to the morality of his own perspective and style of vision, Thomas is fair game for the events that follow. By accident, he photographs what seems to be a crime and then continues to blow up his photograph in search of the elusive, consummating detail that will reveal the truth—a detail needless to say that becomes more evanescent the closer he comes to it. In *Rear Window* the newspaper photographer Scotty is drawn into the lives of the people he thinks he observes with detachment. The crucial emblem of his involvement is his discovery that he has witnessed a murder without knowing it. But there is no problem of sight for Hitchcock except for its moral valence. You have to pay for seeing; you can't be detached. In *Blow-up,* on the other hand, seeing is itself called into question, along with

the minute amassing of facts that purport to lead to a solution. Unlike Hitchcock's, Antonioni's narrative does not follow even a pseudocausal unfolding. Its story is more like a collage, a cubistic refocusing on the protagonist, who, like characters in Antonioni's earlier films, only sporadically follows his first goal. Hitchcock minimized the lost, strayed or stolen object that was the *pretext* for so many of his plots by calling it the McGuffin. But it nevertheless existed. In *Blow-up* the photographer tries to turn the pretext into a text and fails miserably.

Yet, although Antonioni goes beyond Hitchcock in questioning the sufficient reality of the visible world, he shares Hitchcock's final unwillingness to demystify the visual image and the director's privilege of presenting it. Thomas the photographer is not, I think, a surrogate for the director because *Blow-up* specifically characterizes the photograph as a still picture and so necessarily inferior to the cinematic way of seeing the world. By satirizing the fashion photographer's pictures of the down-and-out in a mockery of the naive neorealism that dwells only on the surfaces of reality, *Blow-up* especially implies that the photographic fetishizing of the visible is less "insightful" than that of film. Antonioni's perspective—*as director*—resembles a modernism of the Flaubertian and Joycean sort: God pares his fingernails while his characters squirm in their limited universe of immediacy. It keeps intact one of the most basic assumptions of film: that the directorial perspective is privileged, unquestioned and almost by definition unquestionable. Hitchcock varies this assumption by making the audience, like himself and his characters, complicit in the strange goings on because of their own personal darknesses. But still it is the director who retains the edge of authority sufficient to demonstrate to us our moral lapses and epistemological blindnesses.

To return to Coppola and *The Conversation,* however, there the crime is real and the mystery can be solved—if one interprets the data properly. But Harry Caul, the sound man, who thinks that his equipment allows him to control and understand events, is in fact manipulated by his own belief in his godlike detachment. Much more than the photographer in *Blow-up,* he is a figure of the



THE CONVERSATION

director, especially the director whose technical mastery has been his passport to success. The crucial sentence Caul has recorded he has also misheard, misread, and he had thereby totally mistaken who are the murderers and who are the victims—encouraged by his own outsider's desire to believe that the wealthy prey tyrannically on the innocent. His moral preconceptions, his belief in himself as a controlling intelligence through his expertise, and his manipulation of his technical skills themselves all turn into the agents of his failure.[4]

Yet, despite its critique of the director's technological detachment, the fact that Coppola gave up effective creation of *The Conversation* to Murch indicates that there is some sense in which he has himself tried to escape unscathed from the film's *mea culpa.* One wonders if the maker of *One From the Heart,* with its elaborate paeans to the technology of emotion, has really watched *The Conversation* with the attention it deserves. The similarly divided aims of *Apocalypse Now,* with its simultaneous satire of American technological warfare and its exploration of dark spiritual forces in the Vietnamese jungles, follows *The Conversation* in replicating Coppola's own division between the desire to control through technique and create through imagination.[5]

I have called this interplay between the technological future and the mythic past in Coppola's films a tension, a dialectic, a Jekyll-and-Hyde split in his commitments as filmmaker and moral story-teller. But in the films

Holy communion in APOCALYPSE NOW

of Brian DePalma, it becomes a prime theme on its own. Coppola is the genre story-teller, big daddy director, studio magnate. DePalma believes in the myth of Hollywood with a capital H and, according to all his interviews, loathes it. Yet he has become very successful making films that raise the ante in horror violence beyond even the Corman level, while mixing them with an irony about his own position as the outlaw little kid director now armed with all the technical resources and a good deal of the money of the big guys. Although brought up as a Presbyterian, DePalma acknowledges a strong Catholic cultural background. Of the three directors he is the most fascinated with significant objects, especially the knives and other instruments of cutting so favored by Hitchcock, which take their places in the rituals of the deranged. Neither Coppola nor Scorsese lavishes the attention DePalma does on a table or desk top with its array of objects that create a mood or express a personality. Objects for DePalma are close to icons, and one central icon in his films may be the statue of St. Sebastian in Carrie's closet (not present in Stephen King's novel *Carrie*), the Saint pierced by arrows just as Carrie will by the powers of her own mind later skewer her mother with every kitchen gadget available, murdering and sanctifying her at the same time.[6]

In both *Carrie* and the *Fury,* as well as *Sisters,* DePalma celebrates the power of the mind and the imagination to move the otherwise inert objects of the world and thereby create its own reality. Telekinesis plays the same role in DePalma's films that genre references do in Coppola's and allusions to film history in Scorsese's: it invests the normal and the repetitive with the transcendent spirituality of ritual power. And DePalma particularly vests that imaginative power and strength of mind in a human being, a character, and invariably a young character at that. The young, in Coppola, can never reach the greatness of the past. They succeed primarily in turning it into a machine-like efficiency. The young in Scorsese are burdened immeasurably by their own desires for recognition and justification as dictated by movie stances and gestures from the past. But the young in DePalma have a kind of almost Wordsworthian energy that the adult world is bent on corrupting, not sexually so much as by its superior knowingness and its institutional absorption of their vitality for its own ends. The teen-age computer whiz in *Dressed to Kill* is going to use his own command of film technology to find out who killed his mother. The sound technician in *Blow-Out* is going to face down the entire police department and city government with his revelation of the criminality of a

Non-selective destruction: CARRIE

public figure. Carrie, the schlumpy teenager, falls into experience with her first menstrual period and becomes the butt of the more knowing girls around her. When she is humiliated at the prom, she destroys everything in her path; there is no time for small distinctions about who was nice to her and who wasn't. It is personal power without an adult moral monitor, but also without the adult willingness to conciliate and beg off.

But whereas Carrie's natural magic and that of the young boy and girl in *The Fury* causes disaster to the evil (as well as a few of the good), the technical magic of the computer whiz in *Dressed to Kill,* and even more so that of the sound technician played by John Travolta in *Blow-Out,* really doesn't work. Both are more personally involved in the crime than either the photographer in *Blow-up* or the professional eavesdropper in *The Conversation;* neither has any illusions about the detachment their technology allows; both are using that technology for highly moral ends—to solve a murder or to reveal corruption. But both find their technical command to be fallible. The kid in *Dressed to Kill,* for all his minute tracking of the psychiatrist's patients, fails to understand that the killer walked out of the office rather than into it; his expertise is undermined by his youthful inability to imagine the adult depravity of the schizoid psychiatrist. The sound man in *Blow-Out,* even though he has witnessed the crime and has it on tape, is powerless to prevent the killer's erasure of his taped collection of the world's most significant sounds, just as he is powerless to prevent the murder of the prostitute who has helped him and believed in him. All he can do finally is use her scream in a horror movie—her naturalness, youth, and energy swallowed up by his own now adult and affectless purposes. The difference here is that DePalma himself—unlike Hitchcock, unlike Antonioni, and unlike Coppola—is not left out of the indictment. The prostitute is played, in perhaps a Godardian nod, by his own wife Nancy Allen. And there is more empathy between himself and John Travolta's sound technician than there is dissociation. Antonioni at the end of *Blow-Up* makes David Hemmings disappear, blanking him out of the frame to imply his own more inclusive perspective. But Travolta at the end of *Blow-Out* resembles DePalma, sitting in the studio, opportunistically putting together a film from everything at hand.[7]

There are truths inaccessible to technique, the ending of *Blow-Out* seems to imply, and

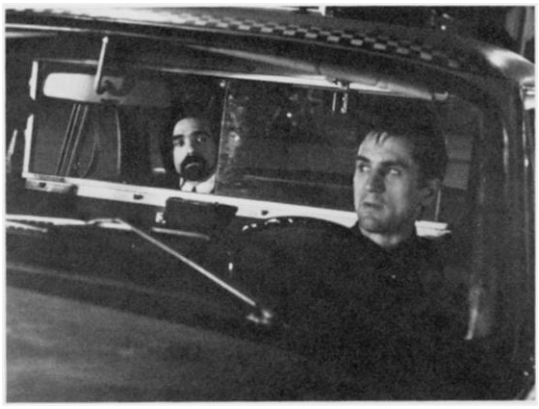
unmimeable by the seemingly lifelike creations of a spiritless technology. In DePalma, as in some Hitchcock, there is a sense that film technique, film style, the film way of seeing, can never penetrate to the real truth, which in essence is invisible. At best we have only symbols, significant objects, details, gestures, that at the crucial juncture reveal their emptiness as ways of explanation and modes of power. As Coppola hankers after the charisma of a Brando that abides technical firepower, so DePalma celebrates the psychic power from within, which technical mastery seems to corrupt or at least to stifle and to warp. He places the Hitchcockian distinction between moral control and aesthetic control further into doubt by bringing (again a bit like Godard) the film-making process itself in for some severe questioning—even of course as he glories in his manipulation of the audience as God-director.[8] In a sense DePalma's aesthetic and moral vision is closer to that of Paul Schrader, the Dutch Calvinist, than to those of Coppola and Scorsese. But his sense of sin includes neither Schrader's moral reversal of established norms nor his puritanical preoccupation with the body and its messes. Instead it is illegitimate authority, aesthetic even more than political, that is the sin for DePalma—and at his best he does not exempt his own.

Every director solves the problem of authority, on the set and in the film, in a different way. And in the unwinding of that way is his or her sense of what constitutes a coherent story. I have been characterizing the approach of Coppola as filled with an anxiety about his own authority, drawn to genre and family rituals as gardens of nostalgia amid decline; and the approach of DePalma as mocking its own authority, especially its derivation from technical mastery, even while he celebrates a psychic energy that ideally makes an otherwise inert technology actually work. In this array, Martin Scorsese is the director who most thematizes his own authority even while he explores the final and perhaps most pervasive aspect of the intersection of film with Catholicism—not ritual or significant objects, but the structure of sainthood. These distinctions are of course not hard and fast, and DePalma especially is fascinated by saint-like figures, especially the natural freak-marvels, while Coppola casts his melodrama of the generations with iconic stars like Brando. But Scorsese much more concertedly places the performer/saint/devil at the center of his films. As the first lines of *Mean Streets* insist, "You don't make up for your sins in church: you do it in the streets; you do it at home. The rest is bullshit and you know it." Like the saint in the church, the saint in the streets of Scorsese's films, so often incarnated by Robert DeNiro, makes the institutional forms into a personal order with an almost monastic fervor.

Scorsese's sense of film relies on film history and especially on the ways the film version of reality warps the consciousness of those without sufficient detachment. Saint-like in their self-sufficient isolation from the normal world, characters like Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* or Rupert Pupkin of *King of Comedy* dictate their own actions and responses by a world of film melodrama. They are enlarged versions of the uncle in *Mean Streets,* who is watching Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* almost for hints on how to be a gangster, while Johnny Boy, the DeNiro character, is outside being shot. Less willing even than Rossellini to separate the natural world from his perception of it, Scorsese places his characters at the center of his films, and the look of the film radiates out from them, just as their moral conceptions of reality and their self-constructions come from the films they have already seen. Like Rossellini, Scorsese is interested in the figure of the saint as a character who moves beyond "realistic" norms, transfiguring his marginality into a kind of transcendence. The extraordinary calm of the Franciscan emissary in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* while he is being brutalized by the bandits embodies a divine spirituality that can subsume earthly violence. In the much more pervasively violent films of Scorsese (who first wanted to be a priest because his asthma prevented him from being a gangster), the stylization of the visual form becomes a kind of skin over the eruptions within, as if to demonstrate how much chaos the rituals of seeing and story-telling can actually subdue. In a certain sense, one can thus place Scorsese in a European line that stretches from Sade to Pasolini, in which the stories of violence and death paradoxically

point to the patterns of the form that contains them and the rituals by which they are distanced and turned into meaning. Like the Neapolitan paintings of Caravaggio and others, with their incessant heads of John the Baptist and Holofernes, their pin-cushion Sebastians, and their massacred Innocents, such works disrupt in order to re-establish, breach in order to heal and re-authorize.

But Scorsese, more than Coppola or DePalma (or Sade and Pasolini, I would say), considers the formal self-questioning of his own authority and complicity to be part of the story he tells. Perhaps, in delivering the sacrament, the individual priest has been made eternal in his role. But Scorsese, with a modern's sense of the ersatz sainthood conferred by the media, cannot stop there. In contrast with DePalma and Coppola, and even more sharply with the blithe, control-celebrating Lucas and the director-worshipping Spielberg, Scorsese continually characterizes himself in his films as an inciting force. In *Mean Streets* he is the killer who shoots DeNiro at the end; in *Taxi Driver* he is the murderous misogynist whose appearance trig-



gers off Travis Bickle's breakdown; in *Raging Bull* he is the barely offscreen make-up man who is preparing Jake LaMotta for his stage appearance reading Shakespeare; and in *King of Comedy,* he is the a.d. who mockingly tells Rupert to ask the director if he really wants to know what's going on.

Interestingly enough, in the successive interplay between Scorsese and DeNiro, there is also a gradually emptying of the main character's moral pretensions and physical courage. With each step he turns more and more into a media figure, hungering for his place in the public eye. In the contemplation of the Italian-American director, there is some irony to be mined from the fact that in the year of *Taxi Driver,* Sylvester Stallone appeared in *Rocky.* Stallone/Travolta are an intriguing contrast with Scorsese/DeNiro: the main stream vs. the outsider Italians, the middlebrow vs. the highbrow film-makers. The most relevant contrast to draw here is the unproblematic quality both of Stallone's thematizing of success and his celebration of winning through the self-conscious creation of a great body. True, Stallone admits that success has its pitfalls, and bodies age. But somehow those problems will be overcome. Scorsese's vision of both fame and physical fitness is much darker. In each of his films there is a progressive defacement of DeNiro—the mohawk haircut in *Taxi Driver,* the bloated weight-gaining to play La Motta in *Raging Bull,* and the odd shot of hands wiping across a window-reflected face in *King of Comedy,* the implied and actual mutilations in *After Hours*—introducing a film that explores the tangle of recognition and personal identity. *Raging Bull* particularly seems to be a direct response to *Rocky,* similarly contemplating the boxer as a figure in working-class and lower-middle-class Italian-American culture. In contrast to the sweet color melodrama of *Rocky,* it is shot in a lusciously harsh black-and-white neo-realist documentary style. Unlike Stallone, Scorsese does not blandly approve the benediction of visible success. In the figures of Bickle, La Motta, and Pupkin there resides instead a sense of the gaping uncertainties of public appearance and the desire for personal fame, along with a raging iconoclasm toward the performer—as if Scorsese wanted to undermine his own inclination to trust too much in the substantiality of images.

All such characters in Scorsese's films are saints of a sort, but saints as heroes *manqués.* In a way they are reminiscent of Rossellini's false General della Rovere, the common man who becomes a hero because others think he is. But Scorsese's saints have an urge to be different and to make a difference that has been totally warped by the culture of visual media in which they try to find themselves.

Jerry Lewis as media saint: THE KING OF COMEDY

In Rupert Pupkin's fantasy wedding, television has become the church. As Scorsese has said of Travis Bickle's more malevolent version of this urge, he's "somewhere between Charles Manson and Saint Paul. . . . He's going to help people so much he's going to kill them." Scorsese's exploration of such upside-down spirituality is part of his own particular inclination toward the performer as the key to a social and cinematic vision. But it is the performer not in the sense of Coppola's ritually murdered Brando, but the performer as the lightning rod for all the crazy pressures on the effort to construct a self in America today. Johnny Boy and Jake La Motta are specifically Italian; Travis Bickle and Rupert Pupkin are not. But all four, like Alice in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore,* as well as many minor characters in Scorsese's films, are infused with the desire to be somebody. That desire, as perhaps it must be in film, is predicated specifically on being seen and paid attention to by an audience. Johnny Boy dies among friends. But Jake La Motta leaves the film to greet a waiting audience, his career now revived, while Travis Bickle's insane shooting spree is turned by the newspapers into a heroic vendetta, and Rupert Pupkin emerges from prison for kidnapping the talkshow host to discover that he has become a celebrity, and Paul Hackett in *After Hours* is finally turned into an absurd art object himself. In *Taxi Driver* and *King of Comedy* especially, such endings are presented as part real, part fantasy, like the ending of Murnau's *The Last Laugh,* the director's salvation of characters he has otherwise presented as doomed by their own obsessive despairs. The transcendences in *Taxi Driver* and *King of Comedy,* though, are specifically examples of a media grace, as false and as true as the spotlight for which the protagonists in such different ways always longed. In *Taxi Driver* the saint has become the scourge; in *King of Comedy* he is a stand-in for all those in the audience who want to be celebrated merely for being themselves.

What I have been arguing here may perhaps be extended and deepened by a consideration of the role of actual ethnicity in the works of these directors. But I'm not sure. In many of these films the ideology is not ethnicity or religion per se so much as it is the way in which those social and psychological forces are mediated by and even subordinated to visual style. The crucial issue is not ethnicity but the *representation of ethnicity* by members of minority groups whose particular angle on the world has been nurtured by the world of films that they now choose to influence in their turn. In a sense, these directors and their films may therefore signal some final stage of actual ethnicity in the interplay between a specifically Italian-Catholic sensibility and the general cultural system of American film history. Instead of taking a more sociological view of evolving ethnicity, I have chosen instead to explore the possibility that the three most prominent young American directors of Italian background have a common set of aesthetic preoccupations (and therefore thematic ideology) that may be at least metaphorically considered to invoke traditionally Catholic attitudes towards the visible world. The neorealists in great part wished to step away from a cinema of stylization and control that Bazin, Rossellini, and others identified with political tyranny. They sought to create films closer to nature and thereby to natural truth. Even in their moments of stylization and artifice, they attempted to preserve the connection of their people, places, and things to a world without mediation (or at least without the mediation of the past). But the past for these young directors cannot be avoided. There is no liberation and little resistance. In this way they are similar to other directors of aspiration ever since the New Wave. The American directors especially are bound up in both the pressure of contemporary media and

Nancy Allen in DRESSED TO KILL

the need to come to terms with a film past. There is no question of being freed from history, only how to gain control of it (Coppola), mock it (DePalma), or meditate upon it and revise it (Scorsese). Thus Coppola, like Lucas, gives aid and comfort to the greats of the past (Welles, Kurosawa), Scorsese busies himself with committees to discover ways of preserving film stock and color dyes, and DePalma gives interviews denouncing Hollywood.

At the pure moment of neorealism described and idealized by Bazin, the God of nature was appealed as an escape from the devil of History. But history is now less God or devil than it is an accumulation whose compulsions can be deflected but not avoided. The only final authority is therefore not outside but within the work. Again unlike the so-called "invisible" style of the neorealists, style here is the necessary signal of personal vision. But each of these directors, in contrast with Lucas and his northern California lack of an ethnic self distinct from movie myths, has a fruitful guilty conscience about the assertion of style and the usurpation of divine or parental authority it implies. It is just that guilty conscience—that sense of the gap between secular metaphors of ritual, sainthood, authority and their religious counterparts—that generates so much of the aesthetic and ideological richness of their films. Like so many other artists these days, Coppola, DePalma and Scorsese are more entrepreneurs and explorers of entrapment than of freedom. But from their very best works we nevertheless emerge to puzzle out endlessly what key it was that so lavishly allowed our release.

NOTES

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Dennis Turner

1. The general assumptions about the basis of the neorealist aesthetic and particularly Bazin's version of what he believes to be Rossellini's practice has been recently challenged by Peter Brunette. See especially "Rossellini and Cinematic Realism," *Cinema Journal, 25* (Fall 1985), 34–49. Brunette here and elsewhere in his view of Rossellini is specifically concerned with the way in which every discourse is constantly subject to erosive counter-discourses that ultimately threaten any classical sense of "unity" in the films, along with, it is implied, the conventionally moral implications of such unity. The connections I shall argue between the seemingly distinct aesthetic of the postwar neorealists and the "school" of Coppola, DePalma, and Scorsese complement some of Brunette's views, although from the angle of film history rather than that of critical theory. On the influence of Fellini's melodramatic style, see Naomi Greene, "Coppola, Cimino: The Operatics of History," *Film Quarterly, 38* (Winter 1984–85), 28–37.
2. Connecting a particular style with a particular politics is tricky business at best, even though theater has traditionally been the mirror of social structure, and film to a certain extent follows in its ideological wake. But I still wonder why the Nazi tendency in propaganda (with the prime exception of Reifenstahl) was toward historical melodrama, while the Fascist was toward documentary. Perhaps it has to do with the relative positions of Nazism and Fascism on the Great Man/Everyman axis, and the way each defined its audience.
3. *The Movie Brats: How the Film Generation Took Over Hollywood* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1979), 101.
4. Caul's mistake has been psychologically interpreted as caused by his paranoia. But to root the explanation exclusively in his character diverts attention away from the aesthetic self-criticism of *The Conversation*. In art paranoia may be just another name for aesthetic unity.
5. The successful Ewok siege of the Death Star substation in *Return of the Jedi* contains the film's only energy because it arises from a similar tension in the imagination of George Lucas.
6. Compare the very unCoppolan moment in *The Conversation* when we discover that Caul has hidden the crucial tape inside a hollow crucifix.
7. The relations between directors and stars can be arrayed on a spectrum from conflict to conspiracy. The basic question remains who is left inside the film and who is allowed to escape. With the examples mentioned above, compare Robert Altman's "erasure" of Paul Newman at the end of *Quintet*.
8. See Myles and Pye, 168.
9. The modernist and minimalist Soho of *After Hours* of course geographically overlaps with the Little Italy of *Mean Streets*. Perhaps the title should appear as *After (H)ours,* to emphasize the denaturing of any ethnic characteristics in either its setting or its hero.

GIDEON BACHMANN

Why Has Incest Always Been Repressed?

A CONVERSATION WITH ALBERTO MORAVIA

In 1965 Moravia's novel *The Lie* created a storm not only because it showed the then-fashionable leftist tendencies of Italian intellectuals to be crumbling under the weight of their disappointment with the materialism of their own national proletariat, but also because it tackled, for the first time, the problem of incest, in Italian society, which, with its tightly knit traditional family structure, had long been suspected to be a secret hotbed of this vice.

Twenty years later the book is being made into a film by Giovanni Soldati, son of the writer Mario Soldati (*Fontamara*), a young family friend of Moravia's and the life companion of the actress Stefania Sandrelli (*The Key*), who, along with Ben Cross, plays a major role in the silm—that of a mother who offers her daughter to her husband in order to hold him. The daughter is played in the film by Amanda Sandrelli, who is Stefania's daughter in real life.

This conversation took place on the set of the film. For the script, Moravia had streamlined the story and brought it up to date.

•

In 1965 certain ideas expressed by you in this book were far ahead of their time, specifically the notions about the nature of work and the selfish pragmatism of the intelligentsia in Italy. Are you not concerned that making the film with an "updated" script will make these ideas sound much less revolutionary?

That is self evident. For the film we have suppressed the reflections on writing—the novel was structured as a novel within a novel —and we only tell the story of these characters, of this woman and her husband and what happens between them in that society.

In the book I had endeavored to show how a novel is born and how it takes shape in the mind of a writer, and how a novel in the process of being born can take the place of a writer's conscience. All this was eliminated, because the cinema has limits. There are things which in the cinema cannot be said.

If you tried to tell them, you would have to find the filmic equivalent, something visual, that could replace the mental and intellectual dimension of writing. I accept, therefore, that in this sense the film is less revolutionary.

You are using the metaphor of incest in order to underline the lack of emotion and of deepfelt relations between people, reducing personal contacts to sheer physical acts. Can this metaphor, today, still be employed without becoming banal?

I don't think so. My idea was this: to show a woman who prostitutes her daughter, but not for money or anger or vice, but because she really believes in a view of things where this becomes positive. She thinks of herself as a sort of high priestess of sex. She wants to initiate her daughter to prostitution as once upon a time it was done in India; in fact, I think it is still done, they are sacred prostitutes. The woman thinks that the daughter should be a prostitute because that is the best thing she could do.

The idea of incest, on the other hand, comes from the fact that in all my work there is always a question of infraction, of the breaking of laws and limits, the revolt against taboos and established codes. From the beginning in my novels there has always been an act of transgression, an idea which represents the complication of pleasure. The simple way it is usually said is that it is more pleasurable to do the things which break rules than the things that all are doing.

It seems that for many people it is more pleasurable to go to bed with a woman with whom they shouldn't be going to bed, than

Moravia at work (Photo: Deborah Beer)

going to bed with a woman with whom it is the natural thing to do. It's the idea upon which De Sade based all his books. It's a form of sadism—not sadism in the sense of cruelty but sadism in the sense of breaking the law, transgressing upon norms established by "normal" life. It is in this sense that I am using the metaphor of incest in this work.

These laws we have established within living memory, but these transgressions, according to you, are in the blood. Do you mean to say that the transgressions are more "normal" than the laws?

No, but I believe this: let's take incest—it's one of humanity's successes. Humanity has managed to create this extraordinary thing: the living together of men and women at the height of their sexual energy without their having sexual relations. And not only are they not having them, they are not even thinking of having them. A great success. You must admit, a greater invention could not have been made . . .

But remember that the taboo of incest is fairly recent. Whereas for example in my book incest only serves to supply a bit of condiment for pleasure, in Sophocles incest is a real tragedy. That means that in the time of Sophocles the taboo of incest must have been a fairly recent invention. At least they were 2000 or 3000 years less removed from its inception than we are. Today, I think, we look upon incest with a certain indifference, whereas in those days a guy gouged his eyes out for having made love to his own mother, right?

The interpretation you give, in your book, to the myth of Oedipus, is, in fact, one of the more interesting aspects of the novel, because what you accuse Oedipus of—of being insufficiently interested in the real world —has become a primary social phenomenon of our age, of our youth.

The whole problem is recent. Before Freud, it didn't exist. It was thought that the young loved their parents and the parents loved their offspring. Freud discovered, instead, that the family was full of guilt. And the main guilt derived from the taboo of incest. Today, psychoanalysis has demoted this taboo machinery. That means we live in an epoch where we look at the taboo frontally—really there aren't any more taboos. Which doesn't mean sisters and brothers or mothers and sons must go to bed with each other. But it does mean that a great mystery has been disbanded. Today, if these things should occur, they would no longer impress anyone.

Are you advocating a view that incest would be a nice thing to do?

I don't even think it's against the law; certainly it's not prohibited. What is prohibited is being seen at it, obscene acts in public. But I do not think that today a brother and sister who make love would end up in prison. All I think it is, today, is a sort of second-nature in man, the incest taboo, and that's why we are not doing it. But who knows how long this attitude will last? Maybe tomorrow we'll have marriages between brothers and sisters, like in the days of the Pharaohs.

What about hereditary damage?

I think incest was initially prohibited for two reasons: according to Engels it occurred because it stopped the transmission of capital wealth. According to Malinowski it came up because culture could no longer be transmitted. Personally I tend to side with Malinowski.

Your preference for Malinowski reminds me of a section in the very first few pages of the book where you speak of the disillusionment of the left. It seems to me that is the pivot of the book. Is that, for you, a Malinowski-type sociological observation or is it something you have experienced yourself?

I have lived through a lot of Italian history. What I have wanted to show here is what happens to a man who was probably on the left in about 1950 right after the war, when in Italy there was a great movement on the left.

It was analogous to the movement of 1968. Except that in 1968 it was not a movement linked especially to communism, whereas in 1950 it was the Communist Party which carried the struggle.

This man at a certain point is disillusioned with the left, but not on a political level. He is disillusioned with the people. He had identified the left with a woman of the people. He had wanted to have a sexual experience with the people. His political ideas had made him idealize a woman of the people.

This happens frequently; Stendhal called it "crystallization"—a very snobbish young man would fall in love with a duchess, and so a man of the left would fall in love with a woman of the lower classes. Or a man with ideas about the Third World falls in love with an African woman. It's a matter of sexual symbols. Sex becomes a catalyst for ideas. Obviously this can only lead to disillusionment.

You could say that what happened to this man in my book is what later did happen to Pasolini. Pasolini was a very cultured man, a very sophisticated intellectual but at a certain point he identified his idea of the people with the boys from the people with whom he was making love. He idealized the people.

At that time Italy was very poor, and so the slums which Pasolini discovered through his books were full of very poor and very sympathetic young boys. What he couldn't foresee, or didn't foresee, anyway, was that with the advent of the "boom"—the prosperity wave in the fifties—these poor boys turned into boys who loved worldly goods, wanted Kawasaki motorcycles and to be rich. That was the crisis of Pasolini's view of the world, of his *Weltanschauung*. It was a serious break for him.

Of course I didn't think of Pasolini when I wrote the book (I wrote the book before this happened to him) but I thought of analogous cases of people I knew. I wanted to show that this woman of the people in the end had a very complicated type of psychology and belonged neither to the people nor to the bourgeois class, and that she—under the man's nose—organized a brothel, a "casa di appuntamenti." That idealizations are always mistakes.

Every man is complete in himself, it is of no

DeSica's TWO WOMEN*—based on the Moravia novel.*

importance whether he is rich or poor, of the people or of the bourgeois class. Every man is a great mystery.

May I then ask you the obvious banal question—does this book have, for you, a personal, autobiographical dimension?

Not at all, on the contrary. Of course, a writer always talks about things he knows, because he must talk about these. But what he uses is the basic experience, not the detailed facts. Take my book *La Ciociara* (*A Woman of Rome*). A book about the war. Well, I lived through the war as a basic experience, I was on the front lines between the Germans and our own fascists. But the characters are invented. It's the basic experience which is autobiographical.

In this book therefore, there is my basic experience with the Italian left and of course, if you want, also my basic experience with prostitution: like all men, I know what this is. But the characters and the story are totally invented.

What about "biographical" in terms of the novelist's craft?

Well, yes, it's an experimental novel. The work within the work. The same technique as *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Pirandello. In fact, when I had finished the book I discovered that I had told almost the same story as he had told in that play, without having been aware of it. There, too, a stepfather goes to a "casa di appuntamento" and finds his stepdaughter. But all that means is a reiteration of the fact that there are really very few stories. Who said that?

To me, Renoir.

They are always the same. You start telling a new one and you find it's really an old one.

You have always been concerned in your work with the question of whether "reality" exists outside of the work of the artist . . .

Yes, the basis of my whole narrative is the relationship with reality. It's remained a mystery to me all my life, this relationship. The problem keeps cropping up. In psychiatric terms I think this lack of relationship with reality is called . . . I've forgotten the term. But when the artist has the brush in his hand with which he knows he can represent reality in a totally invented form, he *must* have doubts as to the existence of reality itself as an objective quality. That's how Kandinsky was able to state that the white canvas was the most beautiful painting.

Doesn't "relationship with reality" include the question of being "understood"?

That's of no importance. In modern art, the rule of similarity no longer exists. There are only two rules, two categories in modern art: expression and benefit. Expression, on a white canvas, exists: I have expressed myself. Benefit there is none, but what the hell . . . Or when Duchamps sent a toilet bowl to the Armory Show in New York in 1916 and said it was a protest against war, it was a form of expression, but without benefit: it was still an ordinary toilet bowl.

In the cinema, where the machine that makes it depends itself on a purely chemical reproduction process, isn't it even more likely that the creative "brush"-like treatment of reality will be curbed?

Yes, literature is more open. A dog in literature is a universal dog, but a dog in the cinema is only that particular dog.

So the cinema is the least Platonic art form, the one that deals least with essence and most with detail? Is it therefore a good vehicle for what you call "basic experience," which is after all a dealing in essence?

Yes, cinema is quite passively linked to reality, to photographic reality.

And yet you've permitted that almost all your works were translated into this medium which cannot but reduce them in stature?

In fact . . . but the cinema can also do marvellous things that literature can't. It can and does change reality, often in an overpowering, arrogant way. Maybe more so than other arts can. In literature and painting that which changes reality is above all the style of a work. It's style that introduces change. But the cinema changes reality itself. In other arts style is mysterious and personal in imposing itself upon an existing reality, but in the cinema the artist—the director, in this case—uses the camera in order to create a totally new reality, to create a new reality in the place of the old one, and that, too, is part of the chemistry of the camera, which lends itself to manipulation. Style is not a manipulation, it is an expression. But with the camera, dealing with reality becomes manipulation.

VIRGINIA WRIGHT WEXMAN

The Critic as Consumer:

Film Study in the University, *Vertigo*, and the Film Canon

The world of art, a sacred island systematically and ostentatiously opposed to the profane, everyday world of production, a sanctuary for gratuitous, disinterested activity in a universe given over to money and self-interest, offers, like theology in a past epoch, an imaginary anthropology obtained by denial of all the negations really brought about by the economy. —Pierre Bourdieu[1]

Though critics customarily consider themselves disinterested observers, their activities are shaped by concrete historical processes. The recent development of a group of film

You have always been concerned in your work with the question of whether "reality" exists outside of the work of the artist . . .

Yes, the basis of my whole narrative is the relationship with reality. It's remained a mystery to me all my life, this relationship. The problem keeps cropping up. In psychiatric terms I think this lack of relationship with reality is called . . . I've forgotten the term. But when the artist has the brush in his hand with which he knows he can represent reality in a totally invented form, he *must* have doubts as to the existence of reality itself as an objective quality. That's how Kandinsky was able to state that the white canvas was the most beautiful painting.

Doesn't "relationship with reality" include the question of being "understood"?

That's of no importance. In modern art, the rule of similarity no longer exists. There are only two rules, two categories in modern art: expression and benefit. Expression, on a white canvas, exists: I have expressed myself. Benefit there is none, but what the hell . . . Or when Duchamps sent a toilet bowl to the Armory Show in New York in 1916 and said it was a protest against war, it was a form of expression, but without benefit: it was still an ordinary toilet bowl.

In the cinema, where the machine that makes it depends itself on a purely chemical reproduction process, isn't it even more likely that the creative "brush"-like treatment of reality will be curbed?

Yes, literature is more open. A dog in literature is a universal dog, but a dog in the cinema is only that particular dog.

So the cinema is the least Platonic art form, the one that deals least with essence and most with detail? Is it therefore a good vehicle for what you call "basic experience," which is after all a dealing in essence?

Yes, cinema is quite passively linked to reality, to photographic reality.

And yet you've permitted that almost all your works were translated into this medium which cannot but reduce them in stature?

In fact . . . but the cinema can also do marvellous things that literature can't. It can and does change reality, often in an overpowering, arrogant way. Maybe more so than other arts can. In literature and painting that which changes reality is above all the style of a work. It's style that introduces change. But the cinema changes reality itself. In other arts style is mysterious and personal in imposing itself upon an existing reality, but in the cinema the artist—the director, in this case—uses the camera in order to create a totally new reality, to create a new reality in the place of the old one, and that, too, is part of the chemistry of the camera, which lends itself to manipulation. Style is not a manipulation, it is an expression. But with the camera, dealing with reality becomes manipulation.

VIRGINIA WRIGHT WEXMAN

The Critic as Consumer:

Film Study in the University, *Vertigo*, and the Film Canon

The world of art, a sacred island systematically and ostentatiously opposed to the profane, everyday world of production, a sanctuary for gratuitous, disinterested activity in a universe given over to money and self-interest, offers, like theology in a past epoch, an imaginary anthropology obtained by denial of all the negations really brought about by the economy. —Pierre Bourdieu[1]

Though critics customarily consider themselves disinterested observers, their activities are shaped by concrete historical processes. The recent development of a group of film

intellectuals within the American academy can be examined as an example of this interaction. Given the body of radical theory produced by many members of this newly constituted intellectual group, one might well assume that the function they have served has been a progressive one. However, these progressive goals operate in a far more limited way than is generally understood. Because the work of film intellectuals leads to practical valuations of film texts, one can view current scholarly practices in the light of these valuations. Why are certain cinematic texts chosen for special attention? Which elements in these texts are singled out for critical discussion?

Film studies, with its fluid and shifting canon, lends itself particularly well to this kind of sociologically oriented inquiry. The past ten years have marked a change in *Sight and Sound's* decennial listings of the ten greatest of all time, suggesting that values held by contemporary film scholars and critics are historically shifting.[2] In 1982, four films appeared on the *Sight and Sound* list that had not appeared on the 1972 list: *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *The Searchers* (1956), *The Seven Samurai* (1954), and *Vertigo* (1958). The appearance of the three American titles may be partly accounted for by the continuing vitality of the auteur theory. Also, the growing interest in film's status as cultural production entailing a complex industry and elaborating generic models has certainly influenced such preferences—as well as the lower regard for films like *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and *Persona*. Neither of these trends, however, account for the fact that three of *Sight and Sound's* newly canonized films were made in the United States during the cold-war period of the fifties. An analysis of the politics of contemporary film scholarship must take such historical specifics into account.

Of the three American films on the list, *Vertigo* is the text that says most about the relation between film aesthetics and the ideology of criticism. Of the three films, *Vertigo* most owes its preeminence to the opinions of cinema scholars rather than the enthusiasm of less "committed" film fans. Moreover, unlike *Singin' in the Rain* and *The Searchers, Vertigo* has generated a sizable body of conflicting critical writing that can be revealingly classified according to ideological positions. In terms of evaluation, what is noteworthy about this critical writing is the *centrality* it grants to this particular film. The film is canonized even by those who argue against it. As Janet Staiger has pointed out, "Some films will be chosen for extensive discussion and analysis, others will be ignored. . . . As ideal fathers, these select films are given homage or rebelled against."[3]

VERTIGO

Critics of *Vertigo* can be broadly divided into two groups. One line of approach, inaugurated by Robin Wood's pioneering 1967 study, speaks to the issue of Hitchcock as an artist, claiming that *Vertigo* masterfully manipulates the codes of "pure cinema," thereby revealing the creative genius of its director. By contrast, for another group of critics *Vertigo's* value rests on the way it reveals—or enacts—an objectification and fetishization of women which is at the heart

of cinema's codes of voyeuristic pleasure. These critical postures correspond closely to the two roles that Gramsci assigns to intellectuals in society. The first role is the one assigned to traditional intellectuals, who are "the dominant group's subalterns, exercising the subaltern's function of social hegemony and political government."[4] Those who argue *Vertigo's* status as "pure cinema" rationalize the hegemonic functions served by particular cinematic institutions at work in the film. The second role Gramsci assigns to intellectuals is an "organic" one, by which a rising group theorizes its own entrance into the upper reaches of the social power structure. From this perspective *Vertigo's* feminist critics can be viewed as a subgroup of a larger group of women intellectuals who have elaborated a discourse on women at a moment when women have been entering high-level positions both within and outside of the academy. The progressive project of this group is entangled with methodological constraints that prevent it from addressing broader and more historically specific issues of class, race, and economics.

To better understand the assumptions implicit in the work of the former of these two groups of intellectuals, we can contrast the insights made possible by the task-oriented approach advocated by Wayne Booth, an approach which follows the development of the text with a view to determining what principles governed its shaping. Donald Spoto's recent biography of Hitchcock, which traces the development of *Vertigo* from the director's purchase of the novel *D'entre les morts,* offers a wealth of material apposite to this approach.[5] Hitchcock's difficulties in putting together a screenplay led him to engage several different writers for the project, and he ultimately instructed Samuel Taylor to write a script without reading the original novel. Taylor constructed the film's narrative around the director's conceptions for various individual scenes. In the meantime, however, Hitchcock had committed himself to using James Stewart and Kim Novak, then two of the most popular stars in Hollywood. And he had also sent his production designer Henry Bumstead on several trips to San Francisco to scout locations. These circumstances suggest that the stars and locations were primary considerations in the director's mind, and that the actual script and story were a secondary and contingent concern.

Given Hitchcock's highly developed sensitivities about the commercial appeal of his movies, it is easy to understand why these particular features of the film, its stars and its status as travelogue, should have preoccupied him from the start. In a now-classic study, Edgar Morin has examined the role played by stars—especially female stars—in the film industry, which promoted a cult of romantic love based on the mystification of female beauty, manufacturing what it then called "love goddesses." As a successful practitioner within the Hollywood industry, Hitchcock was adept at exploiting the images of such major Hollywood stars as Cary Grant and Grace Kelly.

In *Vertigo,* Kim Novak's position as a manufactured romantic idol is a crucial component of the film's power. It has often been noted that the story of an ordinary young woman who is transformed into a celestial beauty by a controlling man recreates the director's relationships with his female stars, many of whom were also transformed into erotic ideals under Hitchcock's own tutelage. But such a reading of Novak's Madeleine-Judy role, by emphasizing the control exercised by an individual director-auteur over his star, shifts the focus of discussion away from the meaning inherent in the star's own presence. In fact, Hitchcock's obsession with controlling his leading ladies, which grew as his career in films progressed, can be seen as an adaptation that for a long period of time enabled him to function more effectively in the environment of commercialized eroticism that defined the Hollywood style. This pattern of behavior did not emerge until *after* Hitchcock had embarked on a career in commercial movie-making and did not reach full-blown proportions until the director had established himself in Hollywood. Thus, the individuated analysis of his romantic obsessions posited by Spoto and others requires the addition of the societally determined mediating term represented by the commercialized eroticism of the film industry.

Kim Novak (as Madeleine), James Stewart

In the case of Kim Novak, control over her image was exercised not just by Hitchcock but more importantly by industry mogul Harry Cohn, president of Columbia Pictures, who arranged to have her constantly watched, forced her to live in her studio dressing room and eat only food prepared by the studio chef, and called her "the fat Polack."[6] Like Judy, Novak was docile enough to accept this bullying for the most part, while occasionally fighting for a modicum of recognition of her own identity—managing, for instance, to keep her surname despite its ethnic overtones.

Specific aspects of the Novak persona that are invoked in her portrayal of Judy include her well-known preference for the color lavender, brought to mind when Judy tries the appeal she herself might have for Scottie by selecting a lavender dress for their first dinner together. By contrast, Madeleine is associated not with the part of the Novak image that speaks of the ordinary young woman chosen for greatness, but with the star's etherialized, aestheticized beauty. The repeated profile shots of Madeleine not only call to mind Novak's then well-publicized classic profile but also evoke the conventions of relief portraiture found in antique cameos and coins. This association of the star's transcendent beauty with the traditions of high art is further alluded to by the connection between Madeleine and the portrait of Carlotta hanging in the art museum.

The film's skillful manipulation of the Novak persona in the Madeleine–Judy figure opposes the spiritual transcendence of the star as erotic ideal to the quotidian material forces that contribute to her ascendency. Such a portrayal is deeply implicated in the contradictory role assigned to contemporary bourgeois women, who act as purveyors of a mystique of beauty at the same time as they are shaped into consumers of the products of a commercial beauty industry. The importance Hitchcock attached to his star, creating a script individually tailored to these aspects of her image, reflects his understanding of and collaboration with the practical and conflict-ridden nature of the American film industry's investment in such figures.

The star system, however, is not the only cinematic institution addressed in *Vertigo*. Hitchcock's predilection for spectacular settings throughout his career has often been remarked on, and this predilection, like his use of stars, plays a significant part in his commercial appeal. In this, he follows a well-defined tradition, for the first documentary films were travelogues, and the more encompassing institutions of commercial cinema itself are partly involved with the project of taking audiences to attractive faraway locales. Thus, the motto of one early studio became: "The world at your fingertips." The early cinema's concern with glamorous settings is not surprising, given the changes taking place in society as a whole at the end of the nineteenth century. Industrialization and vastly improved transportation systems had by then produced an increasingly mobile middle class with a sizable disposable income to spend on travel, an eager audience for cinematic fantasies of escape to alluring, exotic places. One need only recall films such as *Around the World in Eighty Days* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* to appreciate how central such a travelogue function has remained for today's movie audiences.

The cinema's preoccupation with travel is not without ideological implications. In his book *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Shocken, 1976), Dean MacCannell argues that "tourist attractions are an unplanned typology of structure that provides direct access to the modern consciousness or 'world view,' that tourist attractions are precisely analogous to the religious symbolism of primitive peoples. . . . This effort of the international middle class to coordinate the differentiations of the world into a single ideology is intimately linked to its capacity to subordinate other peoples to its

values, industry and future designs."(2, 13) By disseminating and domesticating the far-off, cinema participates in this rhetoric of tourism.

In *Vertigo* Hitchcock indulges the touristic impulse by showing all the famous sights of the San Francisco Bay area: the Golden Gate Bridge; the Embarcadero; Ernie's, the city's best-known restaurant; the art museum; a forest of giant sequoias; hilly streets; scenic, oceanside highways; and cable cars. As if to emphasize his function as tour guide, Hitchcock even sets the film's climax in a location that exists solely as a tourist attraction (though it was doctored for the purposes of the plot). Here again, as happened in the case of his stars, Hitchcock selected these picture-postcard settings early in the production process and had the movie's script tailored to accommodate them. Like Kim Novak, San Francisco is part of *Vertigo's* beauty, beauty defined by a consumerist function.

Both the romantic ideal of the love goddess and the escapist ideal of the tourist attraction have a material dimension, for both beauty and travel are multi-billion-dollar industries. Though the traces of these two related cinematic institutions are readily observable in Hitchcock's film, they are ignored in the commentaries of its art-oriented critics. Whether there is or is not an "essential" or "pure" cinema, art-oriented critics have used this concept to avoid confronting the specific commercial strategies on which much of *Vertigo's* appeal is based. By such time-honored means, borrowed from traditional aesthetics, abstract theoretical formulations enshrine art as a "sanctuary of disinterested activity," while concealing the operations of ideology within it, thereby rationalizing existing social relations.

The feminist critics of *Vertigo* pose a different issue, for as organic intellectuals such critics work within a discernible political agenda designed to further the interests of the group with which they identify. The question here becomes: how does this agenda operate in practice? Who, exactly, profits?

The approach taken by most contemporary feminist film scholarship limits the application of its conclusions to bourgeois women, a limitation which results not only from its selection of cinematic data but also from the methodology most feminist critics commonly use. The methodology at issue here is psychoanalysis. Inspired by Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which uses *Vertigo* as one of its main examples, feminist critics have used psychoanalytic models to open up cinematic texts to a wealth of reading strategies. Following Mulvey, many feminist critics have accepted psychoanalysis as a key to the essential nature of mainstream cinema. Like traditional film intellectuals, feminists' allegiance to such an idealist position, which some assume explains *all* commercial narrative film, can obscure the workings of more culturally specific codes within the cinematic text. To derive analyses that can articulate the specific operations of patriarchy within a particular culture, psychoanalytic perspectives must be integrated with other critical models.

Christine Gledhill, questioning this use of psychoanalysis, has argued for a form of cultural analysis that looks not simply to idealized psychoanalytic models but to the specific social practices by which such models are activated.[7] The distinct discourses that construct social reality can be obscured by a critical approach that uses an essentializing psychoanalytic methodology to interpolate cinematic material that yields too readily to such an approach. Indeed, it can be argued that Hitchcock's recurrent preoccupation with psychoanalysis in his films has often served as a "Maguffin" (to use his term), distracting the viewer's attention from other, more hidden aspects of the text, his shrewd co-optation of a popular discourse that could locate the roots of social dis-ease in psychological rather than economic causes.

For an example of Hitchcock's appropriation of such displacements, consider his comments about what attracted him to *Marnie:* "The fetish idea. A man who wants to go to bed with a thief, just like other men have a yen for a Chinese woman or a colored woman."[8] Given the widespread interest in psychoanalytic readings of Hitchcock's films, it is noteworthy that no critic has commented on the director's remarkable equation of fetishism with miscegenation here. And, more importantly, no one has observed the workings of a similar displacement of racial and class issues into the sphere of sexuality functioning in the

films themselves. Like Hitchcock, feminists committed to psychoanalysis may interpret all cinematic practices in terms of universalizing concepts of fetishization, lack, and voyeuristic exchange. Whether these psychoanalytic operations actually form the essential base of all cinematic art or not, the feminist critics of Hitchcock sometimes tend to describe his films as though they relied solely on such operations. However, a reading of *Vertigo* which poses history as what Fredric Jameson has called an "absent cause" shows other strategies at work.

In a recent essay Michael Rogin mapped the ideological terrain that forms the background of American films of the cold-war period.[9] Using psychoanalytic theory in conjunction with this historical background, Rogin describes the cold-war period as one in which polarized conceptions of "otherness" were particularly evident. In the popular imagination, such conceptions often focused on women. Images of women were often deployed to displace and domesticate fears of a more ungovernable xenophobic cast, fears of the Russians and of "subversives." Such displacements can be negotiated in the cinematic texts themselves through a strategy of paired oppositions, which develop as the narrative proceeds in such a way as to provide the spectator with increasingly refined definitions of the terms involved. In *Vertigo,* an analysis of these paired oppositions, which center on the Madeleine–Judy figure, suggests the limitations of psychoanalytically based textual approaches. Issues such as gender difference, regression, and the organization of filmic space through the agency of the gaze, the mainstays of many psychoanalytic readings, may be less central to our understanding of the operation of many filmic texts than many feminists now consider them.

In the case of gender difference, it is important to recognize that more culturally specific differences may exist within this universal opposition. In *Vertigo* the first of these culturally specific differences initially emphasizes the class contrast between Madeleine and Midge Wood, with whom we see the film's protagonist Scottie Fergusson at the opening of the film. While the all-American Midge appears untainted by conspicuous marks of class, Madeleine is firmly positioned as upper-class. Her family owns a shipyard; she lives in a luxurious apartment building and drives an expensive car. First glimpsed amid the opulent surroundings of an expensive restaurant, she also affects, as do most of Hitchcock's heroines, an upper-class accent. Indeed, Scottie's obsession with her, seen in this context, becomes largely an obsession with money and class.

But Madeleine's upper-class image entails its opposite: the lower-class Judy. Though Scottie spends a considerable amount of money trying to recreate this working-class woman into the upper-class figure he originally idolized, the fruitlessness of his attempt is ultimately exposed when he sees Judy's telltale necklace. Unlike the clothes Scottie buys Judy, this necklace cannot be duplicated. Its status as a symbol of family jewels implies the inherited wealth that marks a truly upper-class person: an aristocrat. In one sense, then, Scottie's shock on seeing this necklace can be construed as the shock of the nouveau-riche aspirant who discovers his inability to buy his way into the upper reaches of old-money society.

Scottie's inchoate identification with aristocratic values grows out of his disdain for work. He rejects the idea of gainful employment for himself at the beginning of the film and later tries to persuade both Midge and Judy to follow his example. Though he succeeds with the malleable Judy, Midge is more resistant. When Scottie rejects Midge's parodic portrait of Carlotta, he is rejecting her Yankee practicality (Midge can't take painting seriously because she has to "make a living")

Kim Novak (as Judy), James Stewart

and literalness (she demystifies the portrait by treating its subject as just another woman, equal to herself). Midge alienates herself from Scottie in this scene by refusing to take seriously his un-American fantasies of aristocratic elegance and ease.

These fantasies, which are focused on the figure of Madeleine, are fantasies not of America but of Europe. The old-world idea of aristocracy is evoked in repeated associations between Madeleine and Europe: her husband's British accent; the Viennese accent of Pop Liebl, who recounts her history; and the Spanish-style mission she frequents. Yet by further defining her social position, such associations also imply still another opposition, an opposition focused on the figure of Carlotta Valdez. Carlotta, who grew up in a Spanish mission town but "danced in the cabarets," becomes a presence of charged ambiguity. Is she a descendant of old Spanish aristocracy, or is she lower-class Latino? The film never specifies, preferring instead to situate her in a realm of exotic class marginality. *Vertigo's* series of oppositions, beginning with gender difference, leading to class difference and from there to ethnic difference, must stop short with the image of Carlotta: the racial opposition that is the logical extension of this series remains, for Hitchcock, unrepresentable. Yet it is significant that Scottie's nightmare reveals Elster not with the blonde, patrician Madeleine but instead beside the darkly ambiguous Carlotta. In the nightmare, Carlotta represents what ultimately terrorizes Scottie, and the fears Carlotta arouses in him are more culturally specific than either Hitchcock or his feminist critics are in a position to acknowledge.

Vertigo's buried references to issues of class and race were contained during the fifties as part of a nationalistic ideology that defined American society in terms of its ability to achieve world dominance. In the context of this cultural fantasy, the meaning of the past in *Vertigo,* so often invoked by critics as a sign of psychological regression, takes on a more political coloration. In the figure of Scottie, the past does indeed connote regression; but Scottie's private dilemma displaces more political connotations attached to the invocation of the past. The film's first reference to the past explicitly connects it to the political sphere: Gavin Elster speaks nostalgically of "the old San Francisco," when men had "freedom and power." The cold-war connotations of the phrase "freedom and power" are unmistakable, for America was at the time seeking power on the international scene in the name of freedom, and it justified these aspirations in part by invoking the country's past heroism in "saving the world for freedom" in World War II.

When the past is next invoked in the film, it refers not to politics but to the figure of Carlotta Valdez, whose rich lover long ago abandoned her and took her child. Pop Liebl's explanation of her tragedy recalls Elster's earlier comments: "Men could do these things in those days. They had the freedom and the power." Here the motif of sexual exploitation is central, but Pop Liebl's story also carries overtones of a past era of American imperialism characterized by the freedom and the power to colonize and plunder, whether the object of exploitation was the resources of an underdeveloped country or the body of an underprivileged woman.

As Rogin points out, the word "freedom" has been variously used throughout American history to construct oppositions which could uphold American interests at the expense of a racial, ethnic, or national "other." Such oppositions recast contradictions within American society itself into a discourse of demonology. In the cold-war period, the most salient contradiction existed between the "free" individual and a newly oppressive mass society characterized by sophisticated patterns of surveillance.

In *Vertigo* such issues are raised through the portrayal of law. Scottie, initially presented as a member of the law-enforcement bureaucracy, withdraws from his responsibilities because he feels he has faltered in carrying out his duty as a watchdog of society's interests. He then becomes a "wanderer," free inasmuch as he is detached from the demands of the law and thus disengaged from the functions of surveillance required in the mass society of fifties America. However, Scottie's relationship with the law is not thereby severed but merely mystified, for his surveillance function merely shifts to a more personalized

site: Madeleine's body. But the film insures that this site must also be regarded in relation to the law, for later, at the hearing on Madeleine's death, he is severely chastized by the judge for his failure to perform his "duty." This censurious judgment gains the imprimatur of a higher order when Hitchcock reveals two male clerics seated behind Madeleine's "injured" husband. Finally, when a nun appears in the belltower during the film's concluding scene, Scottie's dilemma is finally displaced from a public, male world into a private, female one. What is initially presented as the suffocating obligations felt by a fifties American bureaucratic functionary to a group of ruling males—Scottie's job on the police force—is completely transformed into a motif of religious guilt centered on sexual desire. At the same time, Scottie's statement in this scene that he wishes to be "free of the past" displaces terms initially presented with specific political connotations into the realm of the private and the personal.

America's cold-war aspirations to global supremacy are expressed in *Vertigo* not only by the film's depiction of time but also by its depiction of space. One can speak of two opposed conceptions of space operating in *Vertigo:* the panorama and the vortex. Hitchcock announces this opposition during the credit sequence, in which Saul Bass's abstract designs exploit the cinema's capacity to create two-dimensional patterns that can suggest three-dimensional space by means of an optical illusion. Immediately afterward, in the film's first scene of the rooftop chase, this conception is connected with images of the natural world, images that will be developed throughout the narrative: the panorama of the San Francisco skyline in the background followed by the vortex created by Hitchcock's famous track-out, zoom-in shots depicting Scottie's vertiginous vision of the street below.

The panorama has obvious affinities with the touristic world view described earlier, defining a "picturesque," two-dimensional space that negates the actual forces of production and labor that contributed to its creation. Such a two-dimensional, picture-postcard view appears first in Hitchcock's narrative proper as a backdrop to the apartment belonging to the all-American Midge. Later, however, when Scottie visits Elster's office, the background becomes more ominous, for the scene outside of Elster's window depicts the shipyards, implying another world beyond the ocean and the role played by American industrial supremacy in the domination of this world. At the same time, the dominance-oriented two-shots of Scottie and Elster in this scene shift the terms of spatial perception. In contrast to the shot-reverse shot technique of the earlier scene in Midge's apartment, which isolates characters within their own surrounding space, the power relationships represented in Scottie's first scene with Elster reflect an awareness of how the relative positioning of the human subject within the space may suggest structures of dominance.

As the action progresses, two possible positions are defined: the camera's horizontal tracking movements associated with Madeleine suggest a harmonious integration into the three-dimensional space, while the vertical camera movements associated with Scottie's vertigo suggest the fear of being engulfed by the space. Madeleine is often flanked by portals and archways that begin to define more specifically the depth of the filmic field. The depth of field is more dramatically emphasized in scenes in which the camera tracks toward her and in other scenes where she herself approaches the camera to the strains of Bernard Herrmann's Wagnerian musical score. The alluring invitation implied by this three-dimensional quality, however, accelerates to a frightening pitch of intensity during the vertigo shots. At these points the viewer's harmonious incorporation within the space, which is achieved by the complementary alternation of camera movement toward an object and the movement of the object toward the camera, is compressed into a single, humanly impossible operation. This series of oppositions is initiated by the early scene in Elster's office, which specifically associates the opening out of the cinematic space with American industrial power and expansionist aspirations, thereby adding an explicitly political dimension to the anxieties over spatial dominance that are so pervasive throughout the film.

The process by which such political anxieties about dominance and otherness are dis-

placed in *Vertigo* onto the image of the woman is focused on a specific spatial image: the spiral. This image, repeatedly associated with both Madeleine and Carlotta's hairstyles, strikes Scottie powerfully in the art museum scene. The sequence involves both the camera's tracking movement, which invades the filmic space, and the inviting illusion of depth created by the spiral shape of Madeleine's French twist. Many of the film's suppressed issues are condensed into this spiral image, for through it the promise held out by the blonde Madeleine's seductive presence is represented as an invitation to fuse with a hollow shell. The erotic promise of this image is consummated in the final love scene, where the camera circles around the romantic couple in an active imitation of the contours of the spiral associated with Madeleine. Yet, rather than exposing an enticing void into which male fantasies of power and dominance can be projected, Madeleine's confused dependency may conceal the threatening intractibility of the alien Carlotta. Thus the inviting horizontal movement suggested by the women's hair leads to the traumatic vertical oscillations created by the spiral of the stairway during the tower sequences. These sequences depict an ultimate loss of control over the cinematic space, and they end with the fatal fall of an exalted female love object who has represented a projection of male power fantasies.

The implications of the film's spatial oppositions, however, finally culminate not in Madeleine and Carlotta but in Judy. If Madeleine, whose head seen from behind is dominated by the spiral of her hairstyle, invites Scottie to merge with a hollow space, Judy represents not a projective male fantasy but an actual woman. After Scottie's first encounter with her, however, Hitchcock's camera executes a similar track forward into the back of Judy's head. Judy's hair, though, does not coil into an inviting spiral. And this time, rather than losing itself in the woman's body offered as a void, the camera decisively reveals the "other" which has been suppressed by the film's romantic fantasy. For the movement culminates as Judy's head turns toward us, and we are then permitted access to her own mental images, images at odds with Scottie's —and the viewer's—partial and mistaken conceptions about her.

In this image of a woman's head turning, Hitchcock focuses on a representation of otherness that uses gender opposition to emphasize the film's theme of romantic love. But this image of otherness, as we have seen, contains far more complex and localized associations than feminist psychoanalytic theory can account for. As *Vertigo* illustrates, the oppression of women in our culture is intimately related to particular political conditions, and the forms of its representation often exploit such associations. Indeed, the film's abrupt and unresolved ending can be viewed as a signal of its refusal to confront the implications of its strategies. In *Vertigo* Hitchcock has masked the ideological workings of racism and xenophobia beneath a discourse of sexuality that is itself idealized as romantic love.

If the text of Hitchcock's film employs the techniques of cinematic art and the motifs of sexual difference, these techniques and motifs function in part to mask less familiar meanings. Though its rhetorical disguises have seduced film scholars, *Vertigo* is neither a work of pure artistry nor an exercise in essential psychoanalytic truth. Hitchcock, after all, did not create his films in an ivory tower surrounded by cinematic essences; nor did he make them amid the private surroundings of the analytic session. He was a businessman as well as an artist. In 1958 he embarked on a commercial enterprise entitled *Vertigo,* starring Kim Novak and San Francisco. Cinema scholars have now honored this venture as one of their top ten favorites. Such a valuation reflects not only on its object but also on those who sit in judgment. Gramsci's paradigm of the role played by intellectuals in society suggests the ideological stakes involved in interpretations of cultural texts. Film scholars, like others, have class interests at stake: we are not only critics but also consumers.

NOTES

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. Richard Nere (New York: Cambridge University Press), p. 197.
2. For the 1982 list, see *Sight and Sound* 51, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 243. In a 1978 survey of critics conducted by the Belgian Film Archives regarding important American films, *Vertigo* was ranked only eighteenth. See *The Most Important and Misappre-*

ciated American Films Since the Beginning of Cinema* (Brussels: Royal Film Archives of Belgium, 1978). This jump in popularity preceded *Vertigo's* re-release in 1983.

3. Janet Staiger, "The Politics of Film Canons," *Cinema Journal* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 4.

4. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* ed. and trans. Quintin Hore and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 11.

5. Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Ballentine, 1983). The making of *Vertigo* is discussed on pp. 425-35.

6. See Bob Thomas, *King Cohn: The Life and Times of Harry Cohn* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), pp. 325-31.

7. Christine Gledhill, "Developments in Feminist Film Criticism," *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism,* ed. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams (Baltimore, MD: University Publications of America, 1984), pp. 18-48.

8. François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 227.

9. Michael Rogin, "*Kiss Me Deadly:* Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies," *Representations,* no. 6 (Spring 1984): 1-36.

Reviews

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN

Director: Hector Babenco. Producer: David Weisman. Script: Leonard Schrader, from the novel by Manuel Puig. Photography: Radolfo Sanchez. Music: John Neschling. Distribution: Island Alive.

Hector Babenco's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is perhaps the most brilliant proof that Brazilian cinema is coming of age.[1] After nationalizing the film industry's main sectors, the state has made domestic production competitive against "Hollywood imperialism" by various means—subsidies and promotional services, coproduction arrangements and quotas requiring theaters to screen a certain number of domestic films per year. A substantial relaxation in censorship has widened the "legal space" of film production, enabling directors to keep pace with the social and cultural transformations Brazil is facing.[2] Concurrently, a generation of film-makers has emerged which retains Cinema Novo's political interests while eschewing its didacticism and experimentalism. Directors such as Babenco, Reichenbach, Jabor and Yamazaki have attained international reputations and, more importantly, have paved the road to socially committed film-making capable of addressing large audiences. The "popular-commercial" format of their films (including the use of soap opera stars) and their freewheeling attitude towards "cinematic pleasure" (abundant use of sex and humor) could not but evoke sharp criticism from the orthodox left; as a result, says Mark Osiel, "the directors now exist in tension not only with the state (and its censorship), but also with some sectors of the radical intelligentsia (and hence with their own past)".[3]

It is no exaggeration to say that with his last film Babenco has perfected the competitiveness of Brazilian cinematography while providing a lesson to the left. Unlike *Pixote* (1981), his impressive but not too popular story of homeless youth, largely played by nonprofessionals, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* utilizes famous stars and therefore takes a significant step towards commercial success. William Hurt and Sonia Braga are so well known to the American public that it is easy to foresee wide distribution of this film, especially in view of Hurt's prize at Cannes. In addition, the film's potential of winning an international market is considerably increased by its being a cinematic adaptation of a famous Argentine novel by Manuel Puig.[4] Within this palatable framework, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* engages with a number of blatantly political questions from a leftist point of view. As I shall argue, it is in fact a film about and for the left.

Unlike many political films, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is not interested in the depiction of the enemy without—the repressive "system" that imprisons and tortures the two protagonists; that enemy is, so to speak, taken for granted. What is under scrutiny, rather, is the enemy within, as is visually implied by the 360-degree pan of the cell's walls which opens the film: the narrative space curves around the problematic relationship between Valentin and Molina.

Valentin is a hard-core leftist from an upper-class background, who ruled out pleasure from his life-style in the conviction that it would signify the persistence of his bourgeois origin. Pompous, dogmatic and cultivated, he has all the theoretical weapons to decode social and cultural production. Obsessed with explaining everything, he reduces all aspects of life to the ultimate reality of "the struggle." Hence his contemptuous attitude towards

ciated American Films Since the Beginning of Cinema* (Brussels: Royal Film Archives of Belgium, 1978). This jump in popularity preceded *Vertigo's* re-release in 1983.

3. Janet Staiger, "The Politics of Film Canons," *Cinema Journal* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 4.

4. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* ed. and trans. Quintin Hore and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 11.

5. Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Ballentine, 1983). The making of *Vertigo* is discussed on pp. 425-35.

6. See Bob Thomas, *King Cohn: The Life and Times of Harry Cohn* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), pp. 325-31.

7. Christine Gledhill, "Developments in Feminist Film Criticism," *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism,* ed. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams (Baltimore, MD: University Publications of America, 1984), pp. 18-48.

8. François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 227.

9. Michael Rogin, "*Kiss Me Deadly:* Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies," *Representations,* no. 6 (Spring 1984): 1-36.

Reviews

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN

Director: Hector Babenco. Producer: David Weisman. Script: Leonard Schrader, from the novel by Manuel Puig. Photography: Radolfo Sanchez. Music: John Neschling. Distribution: Island Alive.

Hector Babenco's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is perhaps the most brilliant proof that Brazilian cinema is coming of age.[1] After nationalizing the film industry's main sectors, the state has made domestic production competitive against "Hollywood imperialism" by various means—subsidies and promotional services, coproduction arrangements and quotas requiring theaters to screen a certain number of domestic films per year. A substantial relaxation in censorship has widened the "legal space" of film production, enabling directors to keep pace with the social and cultural transformations Brazil is facing.[2] Concurrently, a generation of film-makers has emerged which retains Cinema Novo's political interests while eschewing its didacticism and experimentalism. Directors such as Babenco, Reichenbach, Jabor and Yamazaki have attained international reputations and, more importantly, have paved the road to socially committed film-making capable of addressing large audiences. The "popular-commercial" format of their films (including the use of soap opera stars) and their freewheeling attitude towards "cinematic pleasure" (abundant use of sex and humor) could not but evoke sharp criticism from the orthodox left; as a result, says Mark Osiel, "the directors now exist in tension not only with the state (and its censorship), but also with some sectors of the radical intelligentsia (and hence with their own past)".[3]

It is no exaggeration to say that with his last film Babenco has perfected the competitiveness of Brazilian cinematography while providing a lesson to the left. Unlike *Pixote* (1981), his impressive but not too popular story of homeless youth, largely played by nonprofessionals, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* utilizes famous stars and therefore takes a significant step towards commercial success. William Hurt and Sonia Braga are so well known to the American public that it is easy to foresee wide distribution of this film, especially in view of Hurt's prize at Cannes. In addition, the film's potential of winning an international market is considerably increased by its being a cinematic adaptation of a famous Argentine novel by Manuel Puig.[4] Within this palatable framework, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* engages with a number of blatantly political questions from a leftist point of view. As I shall argue, it is in fact a film about and for the left.

Unlike many political films, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is not interested in the depiction of the enemy without—the repressive "system" that imprisons and tortures the two protagonists; that enemy is, so to speak, taken for granted. What is under scrutiny, rather, is the enemy within, as is visually implied by the 360-degree pan of the cell's walls which opens the film: the narrative space curves around the problematic relationship between Valentin and Molina.

Valentin is a hard-core leftist from an upper-class background, who ruled out pleasure from his life-style in the conviction that it would signify the persistence of his bourgeois origin. Pompous, dogmatic and cultivated, he has all the theoretical weapons to decode social and cultural production. Obsessed with explaining everything, he reduces all aspects of life to the ultimate reality of "the struggle." Hence his contemptuous attitude towards

commercial cinema; only when he is poisoned or needs distraction can he appreciate the "fucking Nazi movie" so passionately described by Molina.

Molina is a queen who, in spite of his being a victim of social prejudice, is not in the least interested in politics. Sensitive and melancholic, he dreams of eternal love with a heterosexual man, and has basically accepted his own lot as an oppressed individual. It is not that he is unaware of oppression, as testified by the comment a "sister" makes about "this hypocritical society." He merely dreams his misery away, having decided, as William Hurt suggests, "to turn society's judgment on him as trash by acting trashy—thereby showing them the worst part about themselves."[5] With respect to cinema, Molina is Valentin's opposite, for he hates analyzing the films which he likes primarily for their capacity to create an openness to wonder and emotions.

The entire film focuses on the initial misunderstandings and growing solidarity between Molina and Valentin, the personal and the political. This single-minded concern with the representation of the imaginary ghetto where orthodox revolutionary politics meets with sexual oppression—a situation indeed symptomatic of the left's recent past—is what makes *Kiss of the Spider Woman* a film about the left.

Kiss of the Spider Woman contains an engrossing portrayal of the most vilified type of homosexual: a queen. Undeniably, it is required of us by our culture to feel a sense of variously expressed unease at the sight of a transvestite, and the film masterfully plays with this. Helped by Hurt's performance—stretched between caricature and tragic composure—Molina's character gradually seduces the most homophobic thinkers and forces them to grant him dignity and respect. Moreover, by privileging Molina visually (close-ups) and audially (we hear his sighs of nostalgic rapture when he delivers the lines of his favorite film), Babenco endows Molina with a centrality that is likely to enhance the viewer's positive response if not identification. The audience starts by laughing at Molina's coquettish affectations, is ready to smile by the time he makes love to Valentin, and implodes with empathy when, after revealing a capacity for love unsurpassed in the film, he goes off to meet his fate.

By endowing Molina with such a positive halo, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* makes him the locus of an attack against sexism. Convinced of being a woman, he displays conventionally "feminine" traits in a film that practically has no women (Leni and Marta are after all reflections of the men's imaginations). Thus, Molina's sensitivity and keen eye for people's hearts succeed in drawing attention and sympathy to some aspects of "femininity" without playing with the desire of the heterosexual male viewer. Coming from somewhere astride sexual difference, Molina's voice makes us heed the proposition that "if there were more people in the world acting like women there would be less torture." However, this is a plea for the "feminine" side that is in all of us rather than a celebration of "natural" qualities. Just as Valentin learns how to appreciate Molina's "femininity" and Molina himself slowly sheds his effeminate mannerisms while retaining his emotional charge, so, the film suggests, we all can move across the rigid line separating "masculine" and "feminine," for they are socially codified economies of feelings and behavior.

Babenco's film does not merely engage in the struggle against homophobic prejudice and sexism; it shows that they are rooted in Valentin's mind as well. Indeed we cannot help being surprised and annoyed at his reiterated references to "acting like a man." No sooner do we hear both the black cop and Valentin screaming "you fucking faggot" at Molina, than we realize that indeed something is wrong with the left Valentin represents. His machismo can in fact be traced back to conventional Marxism's disregard for the personal, private sphere. In this respect, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* contains an indictment of leftist rigidity and therefore belongs to that group of works which mount on attack against revolutionary Reason and its unhealthy rigor. On a theoretical level, the author who comes to mind is of course Pasolini, the Marxist homosexual who lived in his own body the tensions between Valentin and Molina. In his article "What Is Neo-Zdhanovism And What Is Not," not only did he condemn "the fascism of the Left" but actually prefigured and explained the clash between Babenco's two out-

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN

casts.[6] According to Pasolini, a homosexual violates social norms by his/her very physical presence, constituting a sort of "natural" transgression which "may or may not involve political consciousness." On the other hand, the transgression of a political activist is often the result of intellectual choice and therefore is easy prey to "the moralistic extremism" which "becomes neo-Stalinist when reabsorbed by the old Communist culture."

Like Pasolini's, Babenco's criticism of Valentin is the fruit of love rather than hate. For all his laughable and irritating stands (e.g., his refusal to indulge in the pleasure of eating an avocado), Valentin is not a negative figure; he has something to offer Molina (and us), as when he uncovers the wounds on his tortured body and asks: "Is this reality or phantasy?" Here *Kiss of the Spider Woman* seems to suggest that, yes, there is a reality one cannot ignore, but Valentin is so narrow-minded in his perceptions and goals that he fails to see Molina as yet another wound on reality's body. In fact, Valentin needs Molina's proximity to realize the redeeming value of dreams, love and emotions, all pleasures one can steal from "the system." And to the extent that Babenco depicts Valentin's negative posture only to subvert it, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* can be seen as a film about the need to incorporate "irrational" aspects in a struggle that seems to demand an exclusive engagement of the mind. If dreams come as a compassionate morphine shot after torture, the escape they yield cannot be condemned. For the act of not suffering in a system that is bent upon your destruction is also subversive.

This leads us to another aspect of Babenco's film which is relevant to cinema and the left. The Brazilian situation of leftist critics forming what director Diegues called "an ideological patrol," has a correlative in the US, where a global pessimism *à la* Adorno is still rather fashionable in radical circles. In his "What Do Movies Do?" Douglas Kellner argues that "too many radical cultural critics engage in what might be called 'kvetch-criticism,' which primarily denounces mainstream film as a tool of dominant ideology, fails to see ideological conflict within film, or fails to appreciate what films reveal about their societies."[7] Undoubtedly, Valentin would be a "kvetch-critic," ready to stand back from the emotional response produced by the film and to chastise any of its pleasures, first and foremost that of identification. Yet, he not only comes to enjoy Molina's fervid description of a Nazi propaganda film but even draws strength from it. Subtly, the audience is made to see what Molina has seen and is therefore put in a position to appreciate the extent to which he has ignored the film's political message and derived an incitement to keep dreaming about devotion and passion. The snippets of the

German superproduction telling the story of Leni Lamaison and her blue-eyed Nazi officer make us laugh, but Molina takes them seriously and bends them to his own needs. To condemn his identification with the French singer and her sacrificial love amounts to leaving the mobilization of feelings to reactionary politics; for, as a rule, it is the right that appeals to the guts, the left being obsessed with rational distanciation. Significantly, Molina participates in Valentin's struggle (whatever his motives) only after love has produced in him a sense of solidarity; his action is mediated by feelings not thought.

To be sure, all this does not redeem the Nazi film; it simply warns us against constructing the viewer's response in too rigid a fashion. We may infer that Babenco has indeed attempted to focus on issues of cinematic pleasure from his decision to have Molina narrate only the Nazi film among the five that he actually describes in Puig's novel. All five are mainstream productions telling stories of romantic passion obscured by dark forces. One of them even ends with the separation of two lovers because of the man's decision "to remain with the guerrillas," while "the woman goes back all alone to her job in Paris, and the parting is really sad, because the two of them actually love one another."[8] Thus, Babenco has disregarded the possibility of making a collage of Molina's films as well as the opportunity to explore the two cellmates' contrast over the film in which leftist politics face love. Interestingly, there is a sense in which the Nazi film is privileged by the novel itself, for Puig inserts a long footnote quoting "the middle pages" of the imaginary "press-book from Tobis-Berlin Studios regarding the superproduction of *Her Real Glory.*"[9] In effect, the Nazi film does deserve a special place in that it should absolutely repel Molina: together with Jews and communists, homosexuals were people to be exterminated. If Molina's appreciation for this film ruthlessly exposes his political unawareness, it also suggests that an engrossing narrative is more than just its intentional ideological message: "I detest politics," Molina proclaims, "but I'm mad about the leading man." By concentrating on the Nazi film, Babenco's film argues its point by means of paradox: even a declaredly right-wing film contains footholds enabling an appropriation against the grain by a viewer determined to do so. In addition, the propaganda film reveals that Nazism too, like Valentin, legitimizes commitment with an appeal to the redemption of mankind. Yet, Valentin would argue, one needs to distinguish between different kinds of commitment and appeal: they are not all the same. Similarly, mainstream films cannot be lumped together as having a univocal impact on the audience.

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN:
Sonia Braga in the film-within-the-film

By making a plea for a less rigid criticism, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* begs to be judged accordingly. With the exception of the initial 360-degree pan, Babenco's camera work hardly ever draws attention to itself; subservient to plot and characterization, the camera is there to inform. Given the restricted space of the cell, longer takes would have been possible, but Babenco has opted for frequent cuts, the conversational shot-reverse shot of classic cinema. Flashbacks, dreams, and inserts from the Nazi film all come rather predictably and in no way force the spectator to work hard at piecing the story together. In sum: *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is shot with a "transparent style" and is devoid of the experimentalism which characterizes Puig's novel. Yet, for all its complicity with the dominant forms of representation, it is a very effective political film that produces feelings of sympathy with oppression and indignation at unnecessary suffering. It is a film that addresses the left by adopting Molina's spider-stratagems—affection and pleasure—so as to induce key revisions in our ideas about political activity, sexuality and film theory/practice.

An examination of the film's relation to the novel constitutes yet another (more scholarly) point of entrance in the text that strength-

ens the argument above. In the first place, Babenco's very choice to adapt it for the screen is significant in and of itself. Puig is an author with a considerable interest in the cinema, which he studied with Zavattini at the *Centro Sperimentale* in Rome. Moreover, his adolescence in a small town was admittedly enlivened by Hollywood films, so that he certainly is in a position to appreciate the value of entertainment and dreams provided by celluloid heroes. This has prompted Pauline Kael to dismissively label Puig's novel "homage to escapism," which reveals her failure to appreciate the extent to which so-called escape can be good, indeed subversive, in certain situations.[10]

In fact, Puig's text is the site of a dialectical tension between passion and knowledge, sex and politics. The narrator's voice is absent from the story but enters the text by means of eight long footnotes providing a history of recent discourse on homosexuality—from the theories of "physical origin" through Freud and Marcuse to Millet and Taube. The "homage to escapism" represented by Molina is therefore countered by the intellectual passion of the footnotes. Furthermore Valentin's character is more positive in the novel than in the film, for the latter has chosen to highlight his rigidity without any hint of his suggestions' redemptive value. It is no accident that the reader is referred to the first of the footnotes when Valentin admits to his ignorance about homosexuality and expresses his desire to know more about it. It is as if Puig backed Valentin's will to define and investigate.

The first two footnotes, however, report the reactionary and popular views on homosexuality, thus suggesting that Valentin himself is not yet capable of understanding the full political implications of gays' "revolutionary nonconformity." Progressively, the footnotes lead us to regard homosexuality as a libidinal investment which patriarchal society must condemn and repress. As a result, a political framework is suggested as the most viable way to understand homosexuality. Thus, one finds a double, parallel movement in the novel: on the one hand, Valentin's narrow notion of struggle is slowly modified and enriched by his exposure to Molina's passion; on the other, male homosexuality is gradually portrayed as the choice that an "extremely sensitive and precociously intelligent boy" makes in order "to reject the paternal model"—a model that is "violently authoritarian and masculine."[11] We can therefore say that the footnotes aim at weaving together the sexual and the political which are otherwise set in confrontational positions by the dialogic structure of the main text.

Puig's novel is multidimensional. Its several levels of discourse, the psychoanalytic language of the footnotes, the long sections of "inner speech" interrupting the dialogues, all make it a complex book. Such a complexity might disorientate a noninitiated reader but constitutes a treat for intellectuals, for it enables them derive "symbolic profit" from the display of their interpretive competence.[12] Babenco has simplified the novel's structure with an eye to popular taste and has therefore run the risk of disappointing all those who cherish the book for its complexity. It must be remembered, however, that the ultimate thrust of the novel aims at elucidating and politicizing a social reality called homosexuality. In this respect, we may define Puig's book as a text in which a modernist structure serves a realist purpose. Hence, I think that Babenco has not betrayed the novel but has courageously and successfully attempted to popularize and thus make more effective its political dimension. The simplified form makes sure that *Kiss of the Spider Woman* will reach and please not only the Valentins (hardcore intellectuals) but also the Molinas. The film's form matches and reinforces the content which, as we have seen, prescribes that all the Valentins come down to earth.

On the level of the plot, there are three major differences between the film and the novel.

(1) None of the five films Molina recounts in the novel is about the spider woman: it is Valentin who refers to the kiss Molina asks of him before leaving the cell as to the kiss of the spider woman. Later, in his final drugged phantasy, Valentin will dream of "the woman in the deepest part of the jungle" trapped by "the spider web that is growing out of her body."[9] The film makes the spider woman a product of Molina's film-telling and establishes a connection between her, Leni and Marta (Valentin's bourgeois girlfriend), by having Sonia Braga play the three of them.

Thus, by unifying around Molina that world of feelings and dreams to which Valentin is opposed, Babenco's film highlights the contrast between the two.

(2) In the novel the warden is always alone, whereas in the film we see him with the black police officer who is the toughest on Molina. Interestingly, the warden of the film is in a wheel chair and thus seems at the mercy of his black colleague. This may be an ingenious attempt to incorporate in the film a suggestive detail of a movie Molina recounts in the novel, in which a black witch doctor betrays his people by joining and helping the white usurper exploit the natives.

(3) Whereas in the novel Valentin is arrested for inciting factory workers to strike, Babenco shows his capture after he gave his passport to Americo, the old-time revolutionary we repeatedly see taken back to his cell bleeding. Americo, a complete invention of the film, is portrayed as someone who tries to escape but fails, as someone whose struggle is right but whose rigid adherence to old models is detrimental. It is no accident that Valentin confesses of no longer believing in violence while describing his own encounter with Americo to Molina. As a figure of Valentin's past, as a father figure of the left, Americo—or the America that struggles—is the left frozen in its post-sixties stupor, the left that Babenco/Molina's kiss wants to awaken.

—MAURICIO VIANO

NOTES

1. "Bye Bye Boredom: Brazilian Cinema Is Coming of Age" is the title of a very useful article by Mark Osiel in *Cineaste,* vol. XIV, n. 1, 1985, pp. 30–35. My assessment of the present situation of Brazilian cinematography is largely indebted to it as well as to the last issue of *Framework,* n. 28, entirely dedicated to Post Cinema Novo. On the subject, see also the introduction to Randall Johnson, *Cinema Novo* X *Five* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984).
2. In *Framework,*p. 8, Jean Claude Bernadet describes "legal space" as "the space defined by market conditions and the state's procedures" within which "the film maker, like any other intellectual, tends to act."
3. *Osiel,* p. 35.
4. Manuel Puig, *Kiss of the Spider Woman.* (New York: Knopf, 1979). Needless to say the effect is mutual, for the sales of Puig's book have considerably increased since the film appeared.
5. "William Hurt interviewed by Dan Yakir," *Film Comment,* vol. 21, n. 4, July–Aug. 1985.
6. Translated in *October,* n. 13, Summer 1980, pp. 7–10.
7. Kellner's piece is actually a review of Peter Biskind's *Seeing Is Believing* in *Socialist Review,* n. 82/83, 1985, pp. 175–84.
8. *Puig,* p. 122.
9. *Puig,* p. 82.
10. *New Yorker,* Aug. 26, 1985.
11. *Puig,* p. 209.
12. In his book *Distinction* (tr. by Richard Nice, Cambridge: Harvard, 1984), Pierre Bourdieu convincingly shows that the consumption of art is a distinctive practice, for it grants a symbolic profit which is directly proportional to the difficulty of the work that is consumed: "The symbolic profit arising from material or symbolic appropriation of a work of art is measured by the distinctive value which the work derives from the rarity of the disposition and competence which it demands and which determines its class distribution." (p. 229) Thus, "the objects endowed with the greatest distinctive power are those which clearly attest the quality of the appropriation and therefore the quality of their owner. . . . This explains the importance which the pursuit of distinction attaches to all those activities which, like artistic consumption, demand pure, pointless expenditure, especially of the rarest and most precious thing of all, namely time, time devoted to consumption or time devoted to the cultural acquisition which adequate consumption presupposes." (p. 281)

BROADWAY DANNY ROSE

Script and direction: Woody Allen. Photography: Gordon Willis. Music: Dick Hyman. Orion.

Woody Allen's early comedies, from *Take the Money and Run* to *Love and Death,* were praised by most critics for their humor and steadily increasing cinematic skill. Admirers of his later films tend to fall into two groups—those who love the romantic films set in contemporary Manhattan (*Annie Hall, Manhattan, Hannah and Her Sisters*), and those, mainly academic critics, who prefer the "self-reflexive" films about the film-maker, film-making, or the film spectator (*Stardust Memories, Zelig, The Purple Rose of Cairo*).*

Broadway Danny Rose was reviled by some critics when it appeared and, at best, mildly praised by others. That it was not particularly self-reflexive may have disappointed some, that it was not another *Annie Hall* or *Man-*

*Deconstructionist criticism has shown that any text can be read by virtue of those traces of its own generation that any text provides. Self-reflexivity in the usual senses may actually work to conceal a text's operation. Many contemporary critics have blurred this distinction by asserting self-reflexivity not just as a

Thus, by unifying around Molina that world of feelings and dreams to which Valentin is opposed, Babenco's film highlights the contrast between the two.

(2) In the novel the warden is always alone, whereas in the film we see him with the black police officer who is the toughest on Molina. Interestingly, the warden of the film is in a wheel chair and thus seems at the mercy of his black colleague. This may be an ingenious attempt to incorporate in the film a suggestive detail of a movie Molina recounts in the novel, in which a black witch doctor betrays his people by joining and helping the white usurper exploit the natives.

(3) Whereas in the novel Valentin is arrested for inciting factory workers to strike, Babenco shows his capture after he gave his passport to Americo, the old-time revolutionary we repeatedly see taken back to his cell bleeding. Americo, a complete invention of the film, is portrayed as someone who tries to escape but fails, as someone whose struggle is right but whose rigid adherence to old models is detrimental. It is no accident that Valentin confesses of no longer believing in violence while describing his own encounter with Americo to Molina. As a figure of Valentin's past, as a father figure of the left, Americo—or the America that struggles—is the left frozen in its post-sixties stupor, the left that Babenco/Molina's kiss wants to awaken.

—MAURICIO VIANO

NOTES

1. "Bye Bye Boredom: Brazilian Cinema Is Coming of Age" is the title of a very useful article by Mark Osiel in *Cineaste,* vol. XIV, n. 1, 1985, pp. 30–35. My assessment of the present situation of Brazilian cinematography is largely indebted to it as well as to the last issue of *Framework,* n. 28, entirely dedicated to Post Cinema Novo. On the subject, see also the introduction to Randall Johnson, *Cinema Novo* X *Five* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984).
2. In *Framework,*p. 8, Jean Claude Bernadet describes "legal space" as "the space defined by market conditions and the state's procedures" within which "the film maker, like any other intellectual, tends to act."
3. *Osiel,* p. 35.
4. Manuel Puig, *Kiss of the Spider Woman.* (New York: Knopf, 1979). Needless to say the effect is mutual, for the sales of Puig's book have considerably increased since the film appeared.
5. "William Hurt interviewed by Dan Yakir," *Film Comment,* vol. 21, n. 4, July–Aug. 1985.
6. Translated in *October,* n. 13, Summer 1980, pp. 7–10.
7. Kellner's piece is actually a review of Peter Biskind's *Seeing Is Believing* in *Socialist Review,* n. 82/83, 1985, pp. 175–84.
8. *Puig,* p. 122.
9. *Puig,* p. 82.
10. *New Yorker,* Aug. 26, 1985.
11. *Puig,* p. 209.
12. In his book *Distinction* (tr. by Richard Nice, Cambridge: Harvard, 1984), Pierre Bourdieu convincingly shows that the consumption of art is a distinctive practice, for it grants a symbolic profit which is directly proportional to the difficulty of the work that is consumed: "The symbolic profit arising from material or symbolic appropriation of a work of art is measured by the distinctive value which the work derives from the rarity of the disposition and competence which it demands and which determines its class distribution." (p. 229) Thus, "the objects endowed with the greatest distinctive power are those which clearly attest the quality of the appropriation and therefore the quality of their owner. . . . This explains the importance which the pursuit of distinction attaches to all those activities which, like artistic consumption, demand pure, pointless expenditure, especially of the rarest and most precious thing of all, namely time, time devoted to consumption or time devoted to the cultural acquisition which adequate consumption presupposes." (p. 281)

BROADWAY DANNY ROSE

Script and direction: Woody Allen. Photography: Gordon Willis. Music: Dick Hyman. Orion.

Woody Allen's early comedies, from *Take the Money and Run* to *Love and Death,* were praised by most critics for their humor and steadily increasing cinematic skill. Admirers of his later films tend to fall into two groups—those who love the romantic films set in contemporary Manhattan (*Annie Hall, Manhattan, Hannah and Her Sisters*), and those, mainly academic critics, who prefer the "self-reflexive" films about the film-maker, film-making, or the film spectator (*Stardust Memories, Zelig, The Purple Rose of Cairo*).*

Broadway Danny Rose was reviled by some critics when it appeared and, at best, mildly praised by others. That it was not particularly self-reflexive may have disappointed some, that it was not another *Annie Hall* or *Man-*

*Deconstructionist criticism has shown that any text can be read by virtue of those traces of its own generation that any text provides. Self-reflexivity in the usual senses may actually work to conceal a text's operation. Many contemporary critics have blurred this distinction by asserting self-reflexivity not just as a

hattan disappointed many. Indeed the film does not fit comfortably in any category of Allen's work—there are no precedents to *Broadway Danny Rose* and, so far at least, no successors. In the career-summarizing articles occasioned by *Hannah and Her Sisters* (which I have not seen), it has tended to drop out altogether! Yet it seems to me to be Allen's best film, indeed his only completely satisfactory one.

What makes *Broadway Danny Rose* different from other Allen films is first of all its attitudes toward people, reflected among other ways in the altered relations between the Allen figure and the other characters in the film. *Stardust Memories* (1980) was widely criticized for the contempt it expressed toward Sandy Bates's audience, his family, his coworkers—everyone in sight except the character's love object of the moment. That same contempt was implicit, however, in the earlier films. The Allen character's protestations of insecurity and inadequacy were really assertions of his superiority to those around him—who seemed to feel they had nothing to worry about. Leading ladies aside, what other characters does one remember from those films? The Tony Roberts character (played in *Manhattan* by Michael Murphy), is always the same: he is good-looking and therefore nonneurotic. That is all we know about him. The merest of foils, he is no more than a schematic inversion of how the Allen figure sees himself.

BROADWAY DANNY ROSE

Diane Keaton encouraged Allen's narcissism in their films together and vice versa—they often seem to imitate each other. The *Sleeper* scene in which he plays Blanche and she plays Stanley, a digression in a digressive film, is but one example. *Annie Hall* (1977) was said to change all this, but did it? Richard Roud called it "the same old Woody Allen ego-trip. And, unfortunately, Allen is neither as witty nor as wise as he seems to think he is." Allen generously played straight man to Keaton's playing him in a number of the film's scenes, but her performance—a few comic gestures, a few moody ones, set off by countless costume changes—is as superficial as his own. More important, the issues posed by the central relationship (desire, anger, frustration, resentment) are avoided again and again, smoothed over by the spurious nostalgia of Alvy Singer's voice-over.

Stardust Memories seems to me the first Allen film to thematize the character's narcissism and contempt for others, not just to exhibit them. By carrying these attitudes to their extreme and, indeed, by emphasizing their ugliness, Allen in effect criticized his prior work and, perhaps, enabled himself to go beyond it. Is it an accident that *Stardust Memories* was Allen's first post-Keaton film? Or that Allen wrote it without Marshall Brickman, co-author of *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan,* the most sentimental and evasive of his films? *A Midsummer's Sex Comedy,* a weak remake of Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer*

category of description but as a (universal) critical value. Those works that can be shown to be self-reflexive are good, or merit our serious attention; those that cannot be shown to be self-reflexive are less good, or deserve lesser attention. Since any text can be shown to be self-reflexive in some sense, critics are often misled by their own ingenuity in demonstrating it in a particular case. This generic self-reflexivity is one of the "accepted ideas" of the present moment. Of course it affects writers and film-makers as well as critics.

Stardust Memories slavishly imitates Fellini and Bergman, including the self-reflexivity of their films. *The Purple Rose of Cairo* does this to no less a degree, if more subtly. It recalls Fellini's *The White Sheik* (1952) in confronting a bright-eyed "ordinary" woman with her commercially manufactured romantic idol. Allen tries to out-do Fellini's Pirandellian exercises in *8½* by having a character step down from the screen and interact with the film's "real" characters, particularly with Cecelia, the "little woman" enthralled with movies. Allen lacks Fellini's rigor, however, not to mention Pirandello's! Rather than develop his premise, he jumps to another, then another, then another. The defecting character is said to be leaving the screen in other cities also—nothing is made of this; the producers fear a rebellion by screen characters generally—we never come back to them; the other characters in the film-within-the-film are furious at the character who has left and bicker over what to do—this too goes nowhere; the character takes Cecelia into several of the film's scenes—to no particular point—and then takes her out again. Hints that it is all happening in Cecelia's mind are contradicted by other scenes. At film's end, devastated by "reality," Cecelia is back in the moviehouse again, enthralled, just as Cabiria bounces back at the end of Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957).

Night (1955), is a throwback to earlier Allen, but its attention is distributed fairly equally among six characters, only one of whom is played by Woody Allen. Its three heroines (Mia Farrow, Mary Steenburgen, and Julie Hagerty) also parallel the three heroines of *Stardust Memories* (Charlotte Rampling, Marie-Christine Barrault, and Jessica Harper), both films perhaps indicating that Allen was searching for a new leading lady.

Zelig established Mia Farrow as Allen's post-Keaton co-star and was a pivotal Allen film in other respects also. If the Allen character of the earlier films had struggled to belong—in a relationship, in society—then *Zelig* both satirizes that quest and finally fulfills it. It does this specifically by carrying to its extreme another Allen preoccupation—psychoanalysis. For the first time in an Allen film, psychoanalysis is effective. Zelig is cured, forms a lasting bond with a mate, and accepts the limited pleasures of living within the bounds of one (mortal) personality. That Zelig marries his psychiatrist, who is also, despite her leaden pancakes, a mother figure, is symbolically satisfying. (In a realistic film this resolution might be disturbing, but *Zelig* is a fable, a symbolic romance in the vein of Hawthorne and Melville, even a kind of allegory.)

Broadway Danny Rose is thus a post-analytic film; in that its characters are innocent of psychoanalysis, it is also pre-analytic. In both senses, the film marks a return to the real world. Indeed, like *Stardust Memories,* it is photographed in harsh, Arbus-like black-and-white. What is different, however, is that now the Allen character has joined the freaks. When Danny makes Thanksgiving dinner for his grotesque-seeming clients, their grotesqueness—and his—disappears. The cruel and false camera line between "them" and "us" is obliterated. Allen's character is humanized and, equally important, an entire world is opened up for his pen and camera.

There seem to me a greater number of distinctly etched characters in *Broadway Danny Rose* than in all other Allen films combined. None of his other films has a gallery of faces like this—or voices! The earlier films are filled with the chatter of Allen and his leading ladies —Diane Keaton, Louise Lasser, etc. In *Broadway Danny Rose,* for the first time, the director seems to listen. Each of the characters—the seven comedians of the framing story, Danny, Danny's clients, Philly the resort owner, Tina, Lou, Lou's wife, Angelina the fortune teller, the "poet," the "poet's" mother and two brothers, Barney Dunne—even the counterman at the Carnegie Delicatessen whose face we never see—speaks in a distinctive way, mixing individual and regional qualities. The result is a kind of vocal map of the New York City area, with emphasis on the diversity of the characters and their voices, indeed on the specific grain of each voice and the pleasure of listening to it. Narcissism overcome, difference proliferates.

The main characters in *Broadway Danny Rose* also interact as no characters in earlier Allen films have done. The rapport between Allen as Danny and Nick Appollo Forte as Lou Canova is remarkable—despite, or because of, their differences in size, temperament, walking and speaking styles, etc. Their interaction has such integrity that it seems to continue through the long part of the film in which they are separated. Lou says miserably to his wife at one point, "Where's Danny? I got a million questions for him." The line cuts in many directions at once. Lou is in laughably bad shape if he needs minute-by-minute direction in life from Danny Rose. Besides, he and Danny have already gone over the order of Lou's songs, and the other aspects of his appearance that night, again and again. In any case, Danny is with Lou's girlfriend Tina, as Lou well knows. On top of everything—as we later learn—Lou is planning to drop Danny as his manager that very night! If any other Allen film has an equally complex network of relationships, and dialogue, I must have missed something. Allen's humor has also deepened, gaining in complexity from his expanded awareness of other characters and from the "structural irony" of the work as a whole. Lou's line about Danny is not a gag; it is funny, and more, because lines of force from various parts and levels of the film criss-cross in it. In this respect and others, Saul Bellow, who appears as a commentator in *Zelig,* comes to mind. (The seven comedians remind one of Bellow's comic Bummidge in *The Last Analysis;* an innocent character's

brush with the mob, and the destruction of his car with baseball bats, of *Humboldt's Gift.*)

While Lou wonders about Danny, Tina leads him a merry chase over in Jersey—visiting an old boyfriend because a fortune teller has told her to resolve old situations, inadvertently getting Danny pursued by the boyfriend's murderous brothers, then helping him to escape, etc. It also turns out that Tina has been urging Lou to find another manager, indeed that she introduced him to a high-powered agent she knows earlier that week. Danny and Tina's adventure concludes when they finally join Lou backstage at the Waldorf; the betrayal that Tina has engineered, and its consequences, takes up the remainder of the film.

Lou is too disorganized and dependent on Danny to betray him on his own. Tina insists that he do so, arranges the details, and Lou obeys her. Danny has taken up Lou at his lowest ebb, another of his fallen sparrows, and has nurtured him back to self-confidence and modest success. Lou has drawn heavily on Danny's time and devotion and, indeed, on the very day he plans to drop him, asks Danny to bring his girl friend to the Waldorf. Tina, on the other hand, has not met Danny before he comes to pick her up; maneuvering Lou to another agent she sees as a business matter. When Danny first sees Tina, she is on the telephone yelling at Lou and refusing to come that evening. It comes out that she is angry at Lou for putting his arm around a woman at the race track the night before. Is she also angry, consciously or unconsciously, at the morally tacky thing that Lou has done in sending Danny to take her to the Waldorf? This places her in a morally compromising position and, more to the point perhaps, makes her think that what Lou is doing to Danny, and his wife, he might one day do to her. This may be giving Tina too much credit, but she does struggle with her conscience in the second part of the film—and discovers her love for Danny in the process—so she must have some moral sense to begin with. No prior Allen film achieves such ambiguity in its characters and relationships. Given his role in the plot, Lou should be a villain. As Danny says of another client who left him when he gained success: "He's an immoral, dishonest louse—and I say that with all due respect." Lou is all these things but the film remains sympathetic to him. He's a bit like Skimpole in Dickens's *Bleak House,* a moral baby who should —and probably does—know better. His punishment is that he loses Danny's friendship and, later on, Tina's.

When Tina finds her way to Danny's apartment on Thanksgiving, Danny looks at her with hatred. That look has never been seen in an Allen film before, on his face or that of any other major character. It's one of the main things that's missing from the love stories in his films; without it, one might even say, a depiction of love is not possible.

When Danny turns away from her and goes back to his guests, Tina leaves. His feelings for her overtake him, however, apparently to his own surprise, and he runs to catch up with her. The audience may be surprised at these developments but it is the surprise of seeing something that one already knows. Danny and Tina did little but argue on the day they spent together and are in every way an unlikely couple. But the audience has felt a sexual tension between them, missing it seems to me from Allen's other films, and therefore has a feeling of satisfaction when they come together.

These are characters who are not conversant with psychoanalysis. They do not always know their feelings but they discover them by acting out—which serves the interests of drama better than psychoanalytic jokes. (It also facilitates, by a paradox Freud was aware of, the dramatic treatment of psychoanalytic themes.) Ambiguity is restored to the characters and the drama—we are required to interpret them, not just listen to their self-interpretations.

What is told in *Broadway Danny Rose* is inseparable from the way it is told. It seems to me the only Allen film, besides the minor *Zelig,* that is well-constructed, in which a complex subject and a complex narrative mode are intertwined. (Excellence of construction can exceed sheer adequacy to subject and become aesthetically pleasing in itself. In the greatest works, subject and construction do not reflect each other in a static perfection, they pull each other toward greater complexity and implication.)

At the very beginning of the film, we hear a live performance of Lou Canova singing

"Agita" and we see a shot of the Carnegie Deli, followed by a series of dissolves of people inside, coming to rest on a shot of two comedians discussing a joke that had failed the night before. In further dissolves the two comedians become five and then seven. Sound comes up again as one of them (Will Jordan) does an impression of James Mason. Sandy Baron remarks that he first heard this impression backstage at the Sullivan Show with Danny Rose, who is then the topic of discussion for the rest of the film. Four scenes with Danny are shown, punctuated by returns to the laughing comedians, two illustrating the terrible acts that Danny handled are followed by a third on Danny's prior career as a comic —he was so bad that he ended up in "personal management"—and a fourth on his devotion to his clients. This departure from chronological order prepares us for similar departures in the main story to come.

Baron then proposes to tell the ultimate Danny Rose story—"the one with Lou Canova"—warning his listeners to do now whatever they have to do because it is going to take a while, i.e., the rest of the film. We hear Baron's voice on the sound track at many points continuing the story, summarizing developments that are not shown, in four cases backing up to narrate earlier events, flashbacks within the flashback of his story, that bear upon the action. We are frequently reminded that the story is not only told but listened to—Allen cuts back to the comedians in the deli four times for questions or comments on the story by one or more of them, and we occasionally hear their additional remarks on the sound track alone. The final shot of the film shows Danny catching up with Tina in front of the Carnegie Deli; they talk and then walk out of the shot together. The shot is held on the Carnegie as we hear the voices of the comedians commenting on the story, paying the check, and saying goodbye, a process that continues over the final credits. (I cannot recall having seen before a main story merging into a framing story in the same shot.) If I understand their overlapping voices correctly, the comedians are agreeing to meet at the deli again the next day—perhaps to tell more stories as they have done many times before.

Describing the film's narration does not indicate how well it works or how pleasurable it is in itself. The scenes in the deli evoke the pleasures of story-telling and of listening to stories. In reviewing the film several times I was sometimes bored with sections of the main story but never with the comedians or with Sandy Baron's marvellous voice-over narration, which is simultaneously colloquial, formal, detached, and involved. At the story's lowest point—when Danny visits Barney Dunne in the hospital—a listener objects, "I thought this was a funny story. It's terrible." Baron replies, "It's not my life," but then goes on to supply the happy ending his listeners, and the film's audience, desires.

The film's collective narration makes Danny's story a kind of urban folktale, but it also compounds the problems of interpretation. The gaps and contradictions of the story may be read as deriving from the narration as much as from the story itself.

—BRIAN HENDERSON

RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II

Directed by George Pan Cosmatos. Produced by Buzz Feitshans. Screenplay by Sylvester Stallone and James Cameron. Based on characters created by David Morrell. Helicopter unit director and photography: Peter McDonald. Stunt coordinator: Richard (Diamond) Farnsworth. Tri-Star Pictures.

Since its release last May, *Rambo* has become not only a household patronymic but a national phenomenon, an event receiving the kind of full-press media coverage government agencies dread and Hollywood publicity agents dream about: magazine covers (everything from *Soldier of Fortune* to *The New Republic*), news shows (*Nightline* and *Crossfire* bestowed Serious Social Issue status), and countless op-ed pieces from grateful columnists of every stripe. In the main, the liberals were dutifully appalled, with Ellen Goodman ("pushes every fascistic button") and Richard Cohen ("monstous," "ominous") especially rambunctious in their opposition. Even the normally unshakeable Rona Barrett had to draw the line at shrapnel-shaped bubble gum bearing the Rambo logo. Reaching an apoth-

"Agita" and we see a shot of the Carnegie Deli, followed by a series of dissolves of people inside, coming to rest on a shot of two comedians discussing a joke that had failed the night before. In further dissolves the two comedians become five and then seven. Sound comes up again as one of them (Will Jordan) does an impression of James Mason. Sandy Baron remarks that he first heard this impression backstage at the Sullivan Show with Danny Rose, who is then the topic of discussion for the rest of the film. Four scenes with Danny are shown, punctuated by returns to the laughing comedians, two illustrating the terrible acts that Danny handled are followed by a third on Danny's prior career as a comic —he was so bad that he ended up in "personal management"—and a fourth on his devotion to his clients. This departure from chronological order prepares us for similar departures in the main story to come.

Baron then proposes to tell the ultimate Danny Rose story—"the one with Lou Canova"—warning his listeners to do now whatever they have to do because it is going to take a while, i.e., the rest of the film. We hear Baron's voice on the sound track at many points continuing the story, summarizing developments that are not shown, in four cases backing up to narrate earlier events, flashbacks within the flashback of his story, that bear upon the action. We are frequently reminded that the story is not only told but listened to—Allen cuts back to the comedians in the deli four times for questions or comments on the story by one or more of them, and we occasionally hear their additional remarks on the sound track alone. The final shot of the film shows Danny catching up with Tina in front of the Carnegie Deli; they talk and then walk out of the shot together. The shot is held on the Carnegie as we hear the voices of the comedians commenting on the story, paying the check, and saying goodbye, a process that continues over the final credits. (I cannot recall having seen before a main story merging into a framing story in the same shot.) If I understand their overlapping voices correctly, the comedians are agreeing to meet at the deli again the next day—perhaps to tell more stories as they have done many times before.

Describing the film's narration does not indicate how well it works or how pleasurable it is in itself. The scenes in the deli evoke the pleasures of story-telling and of listening to stories. In reviewing the film several times I was sometimes bored with sections of the main story but never with the comedians or with Sandy Baron's marvellous voice-over narration, which is simultaneously colloquial, formal, detached, and involved. At the story's lowest point—when Danny visits Barney Dunne in the hospital—a listener objects, "I thought this was a funny story. It's terrible." Baron replies, "It's not my life," but then goes on to supply the happy ending his listeners, and the film's audience, desires.

The film's collective narration makes Danny's story a kind of urban folktale, but it also compounds the problems of interpretation. The gaps and contradictions of the story may be read as deriving from the narration as much as from the story itself.

—BRIAN HENDERSON

RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II

Directed by George Pan Cosmatos. Produced by Buzz Feitshans. Screenplay by Sylvester Stallone and James Cameron. Based on characters created by David Morrell. Helicopter unit director and photography: Peter McDonald. Stunt coordinator: Richard (Diamond) Farnsworth. Tri-Star Pictures.

Since its release last May, *Rambo* has become not only a household patronymic but a national phenomenon, an event receiving the kind of full-press media coverage government agencies dread and Hollywood publicity agents dream about: magazine covers (everything from *Soldier of Fortune* to *The New Republic*), news shows (*Nightline* and *Crossfire* bestowed Serious Social Issue status), and countless op-ed pieces from grateful columnists of every stripe. In the main, the liberals were dutifully appalled, with Ellen Goodman ("pushes every fascistic button") and Richard Cohen ("monstous," "ominous") especially rambunctious in their opposition. Even the normally unshakeable Rona Barrett had to draw the line at shrapnel-shaped bubble gum bearing the Rambo logo. Reaching an apoth-

RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II

eosis with a joshing one-liner from the president himself, the iconization of Rambo was accomplished with all the accustomed efficiency (and dreary predictability) the curators of American culture can muster.

The film opens with the title character (incarnated, not played, by Sylvester Stallone) applying sledge hammer to rock pile in an early Warner Brothers prison, keeping his perfectly sculpted frame fit while serving five years for the depredations committed in the first *First Blood,* the mammoth action-adventure hit of autumn 1982. Within seconds of the establishing shots, the stiff-backed Colonel Trautman (Richard Crenna), Rambo's former Green Beret mentor and current career manager (motto: "What you chose to call hell, he calls home"), enters to submit minimal exposition—something about returning to Vietnam, rescuing American POWs, and receiving a presidential pardon. In response, Rambo delivers one of his rare complete sentences and the film's most oft-quoted line: "Sir, do we get to win this time?" Quite likely, this not being the CBS Evening News. Unlike the Washington politicians responsible for the original source material, Hollywood producers work from a script when staging their battlefield extravaganzas. Properly polished, a war story that played poorly in the living room can gain new luster—and lucre—with big-screen amplification.

By dint of timing, marketing, and native savvy, *Rambo* has become both the *ne plus ultra* of a new minigenre, the POW rescue flick, and the model for a new breed of action adventure war fantasies with comic book leads (*Invasion U.S.A.* and *Commando*). The former films are the more interesting, a made-for-Freud form in which a Vietnam vet returns in country with (and for) a vengeance. Mission: to salvage the nation's (metaphorical) innocence and (literal) Innocents, the long-suffering, though doubtless mythical, American soldiers still held by the heirs of Ho. Purpose: to attract the prime 18–25-year-old moviegoers, a group whose historical consciousness extends back no further than disco and who have been targeted in their time only by market researchers, not draft officials.

Building slowly in the late seventies and gushing forth in the Reagan era, this vigorous cycle of popular, promilitary features in an obvious antidote to, and stunning reversal of, the so-called "New Hollywood" sensibility, which tended to treat anyone with the taint of DOD or CIA as a vessel for all that was venal and vicious in Ameri(k)a (*Twilight's Last Gleaming* and *Three Days of the Condor*). Likewise, the soldier who served in Viet-

nam (when not simply ignored) was liable to be alternately an emotional/physical cripple (*Coming Home, Cutter's Way*) or an incipient assassin (*Black Sunday, Taxi Driver*) timed to explode at a dramatically opportune moment. In countless *TV Guide* capsule descriptions, "deranged" became the adjective of choice for "Vietnam vet."

With *The Deer Hunter* (1978), the portrait of the vet-as-vermin changed perceptibly. Robert De Niro's character is no Audie Murphy, but he's no Travis Bickle either. On the field of battle and in the hellish VC prison camp, he is every bit the old-fashioned Western hero—fearless, resourceful, loyal. And when he blasts a VC who is coolly incinerating women and children, he wipes out the shadow of Lt. Calley also. Like *Patton* before it, which also scored with audiences right and left, *The Deer Hunter* surely swings both ways. However, its refusal to glamorize the Glorious People's Army of the North or to condescend to the common grunt was a sharp break with current convention (and as such was condemned as racist at the Berlin film festival).

The blockbuster service comedy *Stripes* (1981) was the clearest signal of Hollywood's new regard for men in uniform. As in its distaff precursor, *Private Benjamin,* the military regs and officer class automatons are played for the usual laughs, but the humor is more *No Time for Sergeants* than *F.T.A.* [*Fuck the Army*]. Whereas the Donald Sutherland/Elliott Gould pair in *M*A*S*H* has it all over the bozo professionals of the regular army, the smirking baby boomers played by Bill Murray and Harold Ramis are never seen as morally superior to the military lifers who act the straight men. In the most telling moment of *Stripes,* Murray's exasperated drill sergeant doubles him over with a punch to the solar plexus. We are not dealing here with a righteous exposé of martial cruelty; the message is, the jerk deserves it. Amazingly, by the end of his basic training, as promised in the recruitment ads, army life has made Murray "all that he can be." The last third of the film is devoted to a curious military incursion that anticipates the wish-fulfilling course of the POW wave. While on maneuvers in Europe, part of Murray's unit wanders into East Bloc territory. The communists imprison and torture the American troops. Commandeering a high-tech assault vehicle, Murray and crew go behind enemy lines and pull off a daring hostage rescue operation. Needless to say, the *Stripes* version of military prowess and Yankee ingenuity was preferable to the scenario acted out at Desert One the previous year—just as *Rambo*'s call to action was more satisfying than the dead-end options offered by the strangely synchronistic and commercially fortuitous TWA hostage crisis.

In *Uncommon Valor* (1983), the first of the true POW rescue films, the rehabilitation of American defense personnel continued. The plot is a variant of the *Dirty Dozen* theme, with Gene Hackman playing an MIA father who rounds up his son's old comrades for a privately financed rescue mission. Uncommonly effective as familial melodrama and war story, it is downright startling in its revisionist depiction of the CIA, long a favorite fount of filmic malevolence: in a brief but notable appearance, an American intelligence agent passes aerial photos of a likely POW prison camp to his old friend Hackman. A surprise box-office hit, *Uncommon Valor* spawned the lower-budget *Missing in Action* (1984), a typical Chuck Norris vehicle, in which the chop socky champion extricates an all-WASP squad from the clutches of the Cong. In the laughable freeze-frame climax, Norris, POWs in tow, marches into a negotiating session in Ho Chi Minh City, where smarmy North Vietnamese are denying the existence of POWs. A similarly nuanced prequel, *Missing in Action II: The Beginning,* descended on drive-ins soon afterwards.

Technically, the Rambo character predates all of the above. In his 1972 novel, David Morrell created a relentless, Hemingwayesque narrative around a disturbed Vietnam vet pushed too far. An underground must-read for most of the seventies, *First Blood* was taut, unadorned and riveting, enacting a ritual dance to the death in which hunter and game continually shifted positions. It was brutal but unforgettable. Stallone's film version humanized the central character and (yes) cushioned the book's violence in two significant ways: (1) excepting one accidental manslaughter, Rambo kills none of his pursuers (in the book, they litter the landscape), and (2) Rambo sur-

vives the hunt, avoiding the novel's downbeat ending. Thus Morrell, who left Rambo very dead in 1972, was faced with an intriguing problem of composition when he took the job of novelizing a *First Blood II* screenplay (based on his original characters) by Stallone and James Cameron (from a story by Kevin Jarre yet). He sidesteps the difficulties neatly in a hurried authorial foreword: "In my novel *First Blood,* Rambo died. In the films, he lives." The rest of the author's note plugs the brand-name knife, bow, and arrow Rambo uses. The novelization itself is barely passable as subway reading.

Though its lineage is longer and the packaging more colorfully costly, *Rambo* has the same basic content as its immediate generic forerunners. Blessed with so sure-fire a "high concept," director George Pan Cosmotos and actor/auteur Stallone are too wily to muck up the works by straying into originality. Short on plausibility and long on pyrotechnics, Rambo is a smooth rollercoaster built to make adolescents cheer on cue, the pleasure of B-level fare on an A-level budget being the certain pleasure of a slick ride for money up front at the pay window. But if *Rambo* is largely an exercise in special effects technology—beautiful, billowing gasoline explosions, breathtaking helicopter dogfights, and inventive terminations with extreme prejudice—there is some equally feverish polemical action accompanying the bombs bursting in air. As much as the screech of munitions, the rat-tat-tat of vaguely populist (and self-contradictory) rhetoric is the hallmark of the new, militarist message movies.

In terms of ideological baggage, *Rambo* is as cluttered as the lush Mexican locations that impersonate the jungles of Southeast Asia. There are generous portions of nationalistic red meat: for patriotic provocation, images of haggard POWs rotting in rat-infested tiger cages vie with visions of Thai pirates and VC prison guards stealing all of Richard Loo's best moves. Behind the yellow mendacity, with comforting racist logic, are the Soviets, whose sinister Slavic posturing would be excessive on the professional wrestling circuit. When the head Red (Steven Berkoff) and his oriental minions capture Rambo, they have him stripped, dunked in a slime pit, and strapped to an electrified bed frame. ("I see you are no stranger to pain," sneers the Russian colonel.) They gun down his lovely Amerasian guide and burgeoning romantic interest (Julia Nickson), who looks from *Vogue* and speaks Hollywood ESL (perfect pronunciation, no auxiliary verbs: "What mean 'expendable'?"). For all this, rest assured, they will pay.

Though Rambo amasses an enemy body count of Westmorelandish proportions, his real venom is aimed at the zipperheads on the homefront, embodied by the "stinking bureaucrat" Murdock (Charles Napier). The threatening tagline used to such effect in the advertising campaign ("I'm coming to get *you*") is spoken to the civilian architect of the intentionally ill-fated rescue mission, not the VC baddies. In accord with the film's confused, dual political sensibilities, Murdock, the true villain of the piece, is dressed in New Right colors: Reagan's picture adorns his wall, an American flag graces his desk, and (a sure sign of reactionary sympathies) a copy of G. Gordon Liddy's *Will* lies conspicuously at his side. Nonetheless, he acts like a McNamara liberal: in a pointed echo of the Washington desk jockey's restrictions on the front-line fighting man's tactical options, he orders Rambo to return from the covert operation only with photographic evidence of the POWs. (His instructions have a familiar ring: "Under no circumstances do you engage the enemy.") Similarly, Murdock is typed as a whiz-kid technocrat who sees warfare only as a problem of programming and print-outs, oblivious to the ground-level terror he orchestrates from his secure control room. Thus, when Rambo shows up at the extraction site with a live POW, Murdock aborts the mission. In the film's one memorable cinematic moment, a dizzying aerial shot, Rambo and the POW, seconds from salvation, are left howling at an ascending helicopter as the VC close in from all sides. It is an act of extraordinary malice and a scene of undeniable emotional power. Selectively (schizophrenically?) patriotic, audiences seem quite willing to accept the desertion as consistent with the nature of their "government," an entity never to be confused with "country." Rambo has the same negative capability. "I'd die for my country,"

declares the man who has been successively beaten, besieged, and betrayed by its duly constituted officials.

Like Bruce Springsteen, another non-soldier who has made the veterans' cause his own, Stallone takes his role as a sacred trust. (Interestingly, though real-life vets have scored well electorally, none has yet reached the pop-cult pantheon in film or music.) The Rambo of Morrell's novel was a deranged but fully realized protagonist; on screen, he's strictly Marvel Comics. What keeps the character from careening into kitsch is the total sincerity of Stallone's portrayal, a visible identification (physically and emotionally) of actor with persona that precludes both irony and caricature, and justifies, if not quite redeems, even truly embarrassing interludes like the sobbing peroration from *First Blood.* In *Rambo,* as befits the poetic surname, Sly selects his syllables with greater care (scenarist Cameron allowed Arnold Schwarzenegger more dialogue in *The Terminator*), but he still seeks to speak volumes for the Voiceless Vet. Carnage completed, POWs freed, and vengeance his, Rambo tells Trautman that what he and every guy who "spilt his guts" in Vietnam wants is "for our country to love us as much as we love it." That reconciliation, the filmmakers are sensitive enough to realize, cannot be sold with an end-reel accommodation. The final shot frames Rambo against the murky jungle landscape, solitary and still bitter. *Rambo III* is not likely to find him hoisting brew and grilling burgers with the guys at the American Legion summer picnic.

—THOMAS DOHERTY

The Restored WAY DOWN EAST

We live in an era when the distinction between nostalgia buff and historian has become blurred in the arts, when men and women are eagerly engaged in preserving the remnants of our cultural and pop cultural past. Witness the release of the Blue Note Jazz series, the trend toward reconstructing ballets long believed to have vanished permanently from the repertory, the wide availability of the most obscure songs by Cole Porter and George Gershwin. And those of us who care about movies have been fortunate enough to reap the benefits of the remarkable work done by preservationists at New York's Museum of Modern Art, the UCLA Film Archives and the Los Angeles County Museum. The recent attention paid to reclaiming old films, and providing an experience for audiences that is as close as possible to that enjoyed by their original audiences, enhances the stature of film-makers like D. W. Griffith, whose *Way Down East* has been restored to almost its entire length, in a mostly tinted print, by the Museum of Modern Art. Unable to see his movies as he'd meant them to be seen, many students have accepted his contribution to film with bewilderment, assuming erroneously that whatever he'd accomplished has been comically superceded by the sophistication of contemporary film. In fact, no director, in this country or any other, has ever surpassed D. W. Griffith; among moviemakers, he is our Melville.

Actually, a better comparison would be to Dickens; seen in their complete form, his movies spin like nineteenth-century narratives (especially *Orphans of the Storm,* which in tone and setting—the French Revolution—was clearly inspired by *A Tale of Two Cities*), and *Way Down East* has a meticulous, rhymed, novelistic finish that no one had seen in six and a half decades, involving characters whom viewers of the usual revival print would not recognize. Imagine that the only edition of *David Copperfield* available to readers had spanned 600 pages, and someone suddenly reprinted the full-length (over 800-page) version, featuring subplots and characters eliminated years ago, and you will have an idea of the experience of seeing the abridged *Way Down East* and then the print restored by the Museum of Modern Art crew.

In this case, both the blame for the truncation and the credit for the restoration lie chiefly in Griffith himself. *Way Down East* was an adaptation of a stage play by Lottie Blair Parker and Joseph R. Grismer that Griffith had paid the unprecedentedly exorbitant price of $175,000 for the right to film; the movie repaid that investment many times over. Yet after its triumphant premiere Griffith continued to play with it for several years and eventually edited out about a quarter of

declares the man who has been successively beaten, besieged, and betrayed by its duly constituted officials.

Like Bruce Springsteen, another non-soldier who has made the veterans' cause his own, Stallone takes his role as a sacred trust. (Interestingly, though real-life vets have scored well electorally, none has yet reached the pop-cult pantheon in film or music.) The Rambo of Morrell's novel was a deranged but fully realized protagonist; on screen, he's strictly Marvel Comics. What keeps the character from careening into kitsch is the total sincerity of Stallone's portrayal, a visible identification (physically and emotionally) of actor with persona that precludes both irony and caricature, and justifies, if not quite redeems, even truly embarrassing interludes like the sobbing peroration from *First Blood.* In *Rambo,* as befits the poetic surname, Sly selects his syllables with greater care (scenarist Cameron allowed Arnold Schwarzenegger more dialogue in *The Terminator*), but he still seeks to speak volumes for the Voiceless Vet. Carnage completed, POWs freed, and vengeance his, Rambo tells Trautman that what he and every guy who "spilt his guts" in Vietnam wants is "for our country to love us as much as we love it." That reconciliation, the filmmakers are sensitive enough to realize, cannot be sold with an end-reel accommodation. The final shot frames Rambo against the murky jungle landscape, solitary and still bitter. *Rambo III* is not likely to find him hoisting brew and grilling burgers with the guys at the American Legion summer picnic.

—THOMAS DOHERTY

The Restored WAY DOWN EAST

We live in an era when the distinction between nostalgia buff and historian has become blurred in the arts, when men and women are eagerly engaged in preserving the remnants of our cultural and pop cultural past. Witness the release of the Blue Note Jazz series, the trend toward reconstructing ballets long believed to have vanished permanently from the repertory, the wide availability of the most obscure songs by Cole Porter and George Gershwin. And those of us who care about movies have been fortunate enough to reap the benefits of the remarkable work done by preservationists at New York's Museum of Modern Art, the UCLA Film Archives and the Los Angeles County Museum. The recent attention paid to reclaiming old films, and providing an experience for audiences that is as close as possible to that enjoyed by their original audiences, enhances the stature of film-makers like D. W. Griffith, whose *Way Down East* has been restored to almost its entire length, in a mostly tinted print, by the Museum of Modern Art. Unable to see his movies as he'd meant them to be seen, many students have accepted his contribution to film with bewilderment, assuming erroneously that whatever he'd accomplished has been comically superceded by the sophistication of contemporary film. In fact, no director, in this country or any other, has ever surpassed D. W. Griffith; among moviemakers, he is our Melville.

Actually, a better comparison would be to Dickens; seen in their complete form, his movies spin like nineteenth-century narratives (especially *Orphans of the Storm,* which in tone and setting—the French Revolution—was clearly inspired by *A Tale of Two Cities*), and *Way Down East* has a meticulous, rhymed, novelistic finish that no one had seen in six and a half decades, involving characters whom viewers of the usual revival print would not recognize. Imagine that the only edition of *David Copperfield* available to readers had spanned 600 pages, and someone suddenly reprinted the full-length (over 800-page) version, featuring subplots and characters eliminated years ago, and you will have an idea of the experience of seeing the abridged *Way Down East* and then the print restored by the Museum of Modern Art crew.

In this case, both the blame for the truncation and the credit for the restoration lie chiefly in Griffith himself. *Way Down East* was an adaptation of a stage play by Lottie Blair Parker and Joseph R. Grismer that Griffith had paid the unprecedentedly exorbitant price of $175,000 for the right to film; the movie repaid that investment many times over. Yet after its triumphant premiere Griffith continued to play with it for several years and eventually edited out about a quarter of

it, including most of the comic scenes, which the original reviewers had not regarded favorably. When the Museum archivists set about putting together a definitive print, many versions were in circulation or in private collections, all of them variants of Griffith's original; the most complete was a 16mm print he had donated to the Museum in the thirties. Fortunately, he had also provided a shot-by-shot analysis which, in tandem with the original musical score, furnished a model for the reconstruction. The new 163-minute print contains all but five or six minutes of the original, and (as in the reassembled George Cukor *A Star Is Born*) stills and intertitles bridge the gaps left by missing scenes.

Griffith was a child of the nineteenth century; his sensibility, like that of Dickens, was informed by the popular melodrama he saw on the stage, and like Dickens he made it the narrative basis of his work and transcended it. He was also an expert thief (like Shakespeare), borrowing ideas or even whole passages from other storytellers and then transforming them. *Way Down East* begins as an updated *Cinderella* and turns into *Tess of the d'Ubervilles,* and if we look carefully we can also spot scraps from Hawthorne, from Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome,* and even from *Charley's Aunt.* Griffith's successors validated this process by working off *him:* images from *Way Down East* turn up in such unexpected places as *The Wizard of Oz*—the ornery, tyrannical Miss Gulch is a variation on the busybody spinster Martha Perkins—and Disney's *Snow White,* where the heroine's communion with the birds derives from a serene interlude with Lillian Gish.

The story of the picture centers on Anna Moore (Lillian Gish), urged by her widow mother to visit wealthy relatives in the hopes of buoying up her diminishing family savings. Anna's snobbish cousins treat her shabbily, but an eccentric aunt whom they dare not cross (lest she fail to acknowledge them in her will) insists that Anna be permitted all the privileges of a house guest; she dresses the girl in beautiful new clothes and sends her downstairs to join an elegant party, where she attracts the attention of the incorrigible lecher Lennox Sanderson (Lowell Sherman). (Cinderella goes to the ball and meets Alec d'Urberville.) He courts her relentlessly and, tricking her with a fake marriage, seduces her; when she becomes pregnant, he reveals the truth and abandons her. The baby dies after a few months, and Anna's landlady, Maria Poole (Emily Fitzroy), learning of its illegitimacy, throws her out. She wanders into the countryside, seeking employment, and finds it at the home of Squire Bartlett (Burr McIntosh), who represents an austere, unforgiving Puritanism, and his wife (Kate Bruce), the emblem of a warm, charitable Christianity. Their son David (Richard Barthelmess) is engaged to Kate Brewster (Mary Hay), but they are ill matched and he falls in love with Anna; her feelings of guilt over her past cause her to reject his proposal of marriage, however, and when Sanderson shows up once again—this time to imperil *Kate's* virtue—he tries to intimidate Anna into leaving the Bartletts' farm because he fears for his own reputation. One day Maria Poole arrives in town and, recognizing Anna, relates her story to the town's chief gossip, Martha Perkins (Vivia Ogden), who passes it on to Squire Bartlett. Bartlett, appalled, turns Anna out into a fierce snowstorm (though not before she has unmasked her seducer); she tries to drown her-

WAY DOWN EAST

self, but David rescues her at the last moment and Bartlett begs her forgiveness.

The plot sounds in summary like an amalgam of clichés, and of course it was already archaic by the time Griffith got to it. But today's audiences cheer (without irony) during the eleventh-hour rescue in *Orphans of the Storm,* and the celebrated climax of *Way Down East,* with Richard Barthelmess hopping from one ice floe to the next in a frantic effort to save Lillian Gish from tumbling into the falls, is still breathtaking. The key to understanding Griffith's greatness is in seeing how he suffuses clichés with so much feeling that they take on the power of myth—the way the square dance does in John Ford's *My Darling Clementine,* for example, or the whirling ballroom sequence in Orson Welles's *Magnificent Ambersons*—and how he enshrines certain images so that they seem to exist outside the bounds of time. In *The Birth of a Nation,* Griffith turned to earlier mythmakers, the painters Frederic Remington and Matthew Brady, for inspiration; the rural idyll in *Way Down East*—Lillian Gish on the bank of the river with Richard Barthelmess, her hair flowing down her back, and later alone, watching the reflection of the late afternoon sun on the water—recalls Carot. (The spanking new print enhances the work of Griffith's photographer, Billy Bitzer, which in deteriorated versions goes largely unnoticed. Here he is working with the assistance of Hendrik Sartov.) Another shot of Gish on the road, hesitating at the door of a stranger from whom she must beg food and lodging, has the same strange balance of pastoral and dark elements as the Bougereau painting "The Broken Pitcher," a metaphoric representations of lost virginity.

The entire film can be said to contain that balance, because Anna is in danger until the very end from figures who in Griffith's eyes possess the grasping claws of demons. Lennox Sanderson is not the only villain in the piece, nor is Squire Bartlett the only pillar of Puritanism to be toppled. As in his other films (notably the modern section of *Intolerance*), Griffith seethes with anger here at the interference of tongue-wagging spinsters; his depiction of the chill, granite-faced Maria Poole and the cackling Martha Perkins—both middle-aged single women—contrasts with the gentle, sympathetic hand that shapes the scenes involving the younger characters. For most of the film Martha Perkins is a comic caricature, but between the time she receives Maria Poole's news and the time she releases it she seems to be acting under the influence of hellish forces; there is a startling, Stroheim-like shot of her after she has spoken, rocking back and forth in a chair, hugging herself with vicious delight.

Certainly Griffith could not have taken the worn platitudes of this victimized-innocent fable as far as he did if he had chosen a different actress for the role of Anna Moore. All the mysteries of the miracle of artistic collaboration are embodied in the work Griffith and Lillian Gish did together in the 1910's and early twenties, in films like this one, *The Birth of a Nation, True Heart Susie, Hearts of the World, Orphans of the Storm* and (especially) *Broken Blossoms.* No actress has ever portrayed domestic happiness as beautifully as Gish, because no one has ever made so frighteningly clear how fragile such contentment is and how close the abyss. In Griffith's movies (*True Heart Susie* is an exception, and so, actually, is *Orphans of the Storm,* where it is Dorothy Gish and not Lillian who falls into a nightmare), Gish plays frail heroines damaged by adversity who are in danger of being overtaken by neurotic impulses—Ophelias hovering on the edge of the river bank. The waif spinning round and round in the locked closet in *Broken Blossoms,* the grief-mad lover wandering the battlefields in search of her soldier in *Hearts of the World,* the ravaged virgin drawn by the current in *Way Down East*—these are the desperate feminine extremes to which Gish exposes us. She did indeed play Ophelia in the thirties, to Gielgud's Hamlet; all that remains of that production are a handful of stills and the haunting studio portrait by Edward Steichen, but in *Way Down East* we have a good idea of what she must have been like. It was her own idea to lie on the ice floe with her hair and one tiny hand drifting in the water, and she caught a chill in that hand that has never left her. (Her performance attained some sort of bizarre height in physical bravery: as is well known, she nearly went over the falls for real during the shooting of this scene.)

Her portrayal of Anna is full of emotional

changes, registered with such astonishing naturalism in her delicate face that we never catch her in a false moment. There is the scene in which Sanderson makes a pass at her and then soothes her offended sensibilities by proposing marriage; the "wedding night," when her trusting devotion to her spurious husband stirs her deeply hidden sensuality, and she abandons herself to her childish dreams of marital love; the scene in which Sanderson tells her the truth, and she pulls her wedding ring on and off her finger as pathetic proof that he must be joking. Most extraordinary of all is the sequence (right out of Thomas Hardy) in which she baptizes her dying baby and tries hopelessly to warm its feet with her breath. She takes us so far inside the psychology of entrapment and loss and despair that we seem to comprehend it for the first time.

The same year as *Way Down East,* Eugene O'Neill wrote *Beyond the Horizon,* the play that won him his first fame (and his first Pulitzer Prize); his two antagonists were brothers, one a practical man of the soil and the other a poet infected with wanderlust. David Bartlett, the hero of *Way Down East,* is a heroic figure in whom the best impulses of both Mayo brothers are wedded: he is a dedicated farmer (like his father) and a gentle-souled poet (like his mother). Richard Barthelmess, whose career continued into the early forties, was that rare actor who could carry off country-boy bashfulness without appearing unmanly or sacrificing any of his sensitivity—in other words, without playing a bumpkin. And he and Gish were an ideal match—here, where the script connects them psychically, *Peter Ibbetson*-style, before they have even met, and in *Broken Blossoms,* where Barthelmess did his finest work as a lonely Chinese in London's Limehouse district. The two pairs of roles are tonal opposites: in *Broken Blossoms,* the scenes between the Chinese and the waif are overhung with a sense of tragic foreboding, whereas the brief romantic interludes in *Way Down East* suggest an emotional wholeness, a *rightness,* that Griffith offers as a promise of happiness to come. If Anna were to drown in that river, the movie would be unfinished—a cheat. Griffith understood this well enough to gather all his plot strands into a bouquet for the deeply unsatisfying finale; and at the end of this newly restored version of a Griffith masterpiece, containing the final scene he had excised ill-judgedly sometime during the twenties, the audience stumbles out into the lobby grinning and wiping away tears.

—STEVE VINEBERG

THE IS/LAND

A film by David Goldberg and Michael Oblovitz. Source (16mm and videotape): Metafilms Inc., 31 Warren Street, New York, NY 10007 (tel. 212 - 964-4730).

The Is/Land (1982) is a polemic on the interrelationship of language and political power, by David Goldberg and Michael Oblowitz, natives of Cape Town who came to New York in the seventies. The focus of the film is South African apartheid. A variety of kinds of information are used: footage of events and places recycled from a propaganda film produced by the South African government in order to promote foreign investment; printed (mostly computer-generated) texts about, or relating to the nature and history of apartheid; passages of narration about the events and places documented; footage of newspaper/magazine documentation of apartheid; and a map of Africa. These information sources are presented in a variety of configurations, the most dramatic and memorable of which occurs three times during the 27-minute film: two live-action sequences of events are presented, one on each side of the screen; they are separated by a wide dark strip (itself bounded on the left and on the right by an orange line) through which roll a series of computer-generated texts with two kinds of information: mathematical equations purporting to relate to the various ethnic and class groupings in South Africa, and a series of four dated historical events: "1913—Native Land Act Prohibits Blacks Owning Land"; "1948—White Nationalists Gain Political Control"; "1960—S.A. Secedes From U.K."; "1975—Television Introduced in S.A." While the live-action imagery changes each time, it nevertheless repeatedly dramatizes the central political division in South Africa; in each case black South Africans, or events occurring in black areas, are seen on one side, white South Africans, or events occurring in white areas, on the other. The image/text structure of the

changes, registered with such astonishing naturalism in her delicate face that we never catch her in a false moment. There is the scene in which Sanderson makes a pass at her and then soothes her offended sensibilities by proposing marriage; the "wedding night," when her trusting devotion to her spurious husband stirs her deeply hidden sensuality, and she abandons herself to her childish dreams of marital love; the scene in which Sanderson tells her the truth, and she pulls her wedding ring on and off her finger as pathetic proof that he must be joking. Most extraordinary of all is the sequence (right out of Thomas Hardy) in which she baptizes her dying baby and tries hopelessly to warm its feet with her breath. She takes us so far inside the psychology of entrapment and loss and despair that we seem to comprehend it for the first time.

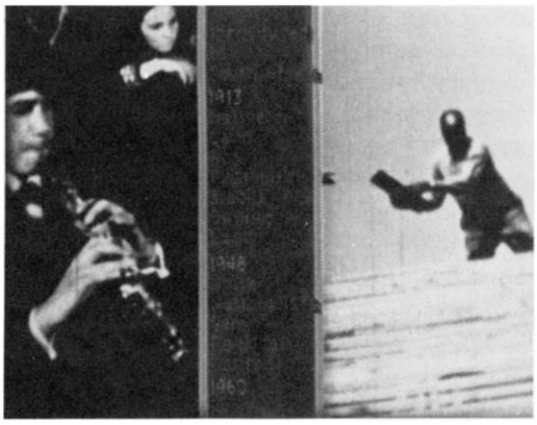
The same year as *Way Down East,* Eugene O'Neill wrote *Beyond the Horizon,* the play that won him his first fame (and his first Pulitzer Prize); his two antagonists were brothers, one a practical man of the soil and the other a poet infected with wanderlust. David Bartlett, the hero of *Way Down East,* is a heroic figure in whom the best impulses of both Mayo brothers are wedded: he is a dedicated farmer (like his father) and a gentle-souled poet (like his mother). Richard Barthelmess, whose career continued into the early forties, was that rare actor who could carry off country-boy bashfulness without appearing unmanly or sacrificing any of his sensitivity—in other words, without playing a bumpkin. And he and Gish were an ideal match—here, where the script connects them psychically, *Peter Ibbetson*-style, before they have even met, and in *Broken Blossoms,* where Barthelmess did his finest work as a lonely Chinese in London's Limehouse district. The two pairs of roles are tonal opposites: in *Broken Blossoms,* the scenes between the Chinese and the waif are overhung with a sense of tragic foreboding, whereas the brief romantic interludes in *Way Down East* suggest an emotional wholeness, a *rightness,* that Griffith offers as a promise of happiness to come. If Anna were to drown in that river, the movie would be unfinished—a cheat. Griffith understood this well enough to gather all his plot strands into a bouquet for the deeply unsatisfying finale; and at the end of this newly restored version of a Griffith masterpiece, containing the final scene he had excised ill-judgedly sometime during the twenties, the audience stumbles out into the lobby grinning and wiping away tears.

—STEVE VINEBERG

THE IS/LAND

A film by David Goldberg and Michael Oblovitz. Source (16mm and videotape): Metafilms Inc., 31 Warren Street, New York, NY 10007 (tel. 212 - 964-4730).

The Is/Land (1982) is a polemic on the interrelationship of language and political power, by David Goldberg and Michael Oblowitz, natives of Cape Town who came to New York in the seventies. The focus of the film is South African apartheid. A variety of kinds of information are used: footage of events and places recycled from a propaganda film produced by the South African government in order to promote foreign investment; printed (mostly computer-generated) texts about, or relating to the nature and history of apartheid; passages of narration about the events and places documented; footage of newspaper/magazine documentation of apartheid; and a map of Africa. These information sources are presented in a variety of configurations, the most dramatic and memorable of which occurs three times during the 27-minute film: two live-action sequences of events are presented, one on each side of the screen; they are separated by a wide dark strip (itself bounded on the left and on the right by an orange line) through which roll a series of computer-generated texts with two kinds of information: mathematical equations purporting to relate to the various ethnic and class groupings in South Africa, and a series of four dated historical events: "1913—Native Land Act Prohibits Blacks Owning Land"; "1948—White Nationalists Gain Political Control"; "1960—S.A. Secedes From U.K."; "1975—Television Introduced in S.A." While the live-action imagery changes each time, it nevertheless repeatedly dramatizes the central political division in South Africa; in each case black South Africans, or events occurring in black areas, are seen on one side, white South Africans, or events occurring in white areas, on the other. The image/text structure of the



THE IS/LAND

frame functions as a metaphor for language's role in keeping the races divided. And, because the complex, obscure rolling texts include such expressions as

aPb—a has power over B
Ta—a has technology of power
Ra—a utilizes prisons
aOb—a uses panopticon to control b
aPb → Ta
Ta → Ra & (Ra ≡ aOb
∴ aPb → aOb)

which move through the image very quickly, these passages also give viewers a mild taste of the frustration of being systematically excluded from a complex discourse which involves them.

Other configurations of text and image elaborate the metaphor suggested by the title. Early in the film we see stills of what appears to be a prison and hear a narration about Robben Island, a South African prison for blacks, nicknamed the "madhouse" ("It was called this not because you were mad when you went in, but because you were mad when you came out"). The narrator describes the system of discipline on Robben Island, the core of which seems to be isolation, both physical and linguistic: "We were never allowed to speak on behalf of others. When we made a complaint, it had to be 'I,' but still we said 'we.' Then they wouldn't listen to us"; "I once received a letter where all that was left was the address of the sender. The entire letter had been cut away; the blank paper between what had been paragraphs held the whole page together. . . . But that counted as a letter received when I was allowed only one every six months"; "I questioned [one man] about his speech impediment. He showed me that the front part of his tongue had been cut off . . . while in segregation"; "I reached a stage where I literally forgot how to read. I used to look at words in a book and they ceased to have meaning." Each individual prisoner is made into an island within The Island—one of the implications of the various ways in which the title is printed at the beginning of the film: "ISLAND," "IS/LAND," "I/LAND." As the film develops, we realize that the Robben Island prison and its methods are themselves a metaphor for, an encapsulization of the whole of South Africa, an "island" of segregation in which blacks are limited to islands of physical/linguistic territory. This implication is confirmed by a series of slow-motion shots of the inauguration of Kiser Mantanzima, the first prime minister of Bantustan, an all-black enclave within South Africa with limited "self-government."

The implications of the island metaphor are extended in a number of instances where information is presented inside a frame-within-the-film-frame (an "island" within the "island" of the projected space [within the "island" of the theater]). This occurs when, soon after we see the vertically arranged words NAMING, DEFINITION, MEANING flashing on and off, we see a second triad of vertically arranged words: LEPER, EXCLUSION, BLACK, the second three set within a dark matte. Titles explain later that Robben Island was a leper colony and an asylum before it was a prison. One cannot but wonder how much this history informs the larger society's sense of the inmates and the inmates' sense of themselves. A similar frame-within-the-frame opens the film: the title credits and the map of Africa are seen on the "island" of a video monitor surrounded by dark space. The use of the monitor as an "island"—and the film's frequent use of computer-generated texts as well—suggests that such technological systems are essentially, or at least largely, extensions of linguistic systems which help to maintain the gap between individuals and between the races. This idea is confirmed by a shot seen both full-screen and in the background of the image-within-the-image where we read LEPER/EXCLUSION/BLACK: we look out the side

window of a vehicle as dry, bare countryside passes by; there seems to be nothing to see, except the power poles and lines which regularly pass the vehicle. Power lines are such a normal part of modern life that we barely notice them. In the present context, however, they are indices of the sophisticated energy and communication systems which use the lines, systems so crucial for the maintenance of the white minority's domination. And to follow this further: whether we participate in *The Is/Land* via TV or film, we are seeing it, implicitly because of our participation in this exertion of power; we are part of the system, the film suggests/demonstrates, as are its makers.

The Is/Land is a cagy (and/or lucky) film. Even its apparent limitations can be seen as contributing to its polemical thrust. The most obvious limitation is the sound quality of the narrations. While the male voice that narrates the passages about Robben Island is clear and distinct, both the female voice which opens the film, providing a series of general statements about the workings of language, and the black man we see and hear delivering a speech in what appears to be a school auditorium, are difficult to understand. The complexity of what the woman says (she opens the film with, "The logic of domination has evolved out of and shored up the foundations of a subjectivity, itself concerned to maintain and reproduce the island of individuality, thereby establishing a subjection manifesting itself on various levels—economic, political, juridical, ideological") and the acoustics of the room in which the man is lecturing (combined with the accent of his English, which I assume is South African) inhibit comprehension; and our frustration further dramatizes the film's central contention: that who we are and how we react and how we are used is as fully a question of our linguistic environment in all of its extensions as of anything else.

—SCOTT MacDONALD

SE PERMUTA

Directed by Juan Carlos Tabío. Written by Tabío, with collaboration by Raúl García. Story by Tabío and Jesús Gregorio, based on an idea by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Photography: Julio Valdés. Cinema Guild, 1697 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

Se Permuta, a farce that revolves around Cuba's housing shortage, is the first unabashed sitcom produced by ICAIC, Cuba's 25-year-old film institute, and a hilarious guide to the state of the heart of Cuban society. It is no accident that its director, Juan Carlos Tabío, has grown up with the revolution.

The plot takes off from the fact that, in a country with a longstanding housing shortage and a frozen market in real estate, people exchange dwellings as their personal circumstances change. The result is that the ever-present plaque, "Se Permuta"—for exchange—on houses is a tip-off to soap opera within. Apartment swapping is fueled by heartthrob and hearth-lust, by sexual and social aspiration.

In *Se Permuta,* a mother (Rosita Fornés, a famous theatrical and nightclub actress) executes a complicated three-way housing swap to move her daughter (the lovely Isabel Santos) to a neighborhood where she can meet a better class of boy. When her daughter, who aspires to be a city planner, meets a fast-talking ad man (Ramoncito Veloz, Jr.), the mother begins another round of swaps to win them the house of the ad man's dreams. Dragged into the scheme is a friend's fiancé, an aspiring engineer (Mario Balmaseda). No sooner is the elaborate plan in place, of course, than lovers start swapping partners, leaving families stranded with furniture on the streets. It takes the rest of the movie to get everyone properly mixed, matched and housed.

At the stable core of the film is the bloom ing love affair between the only two people in the movie who aren't into this chutes-and-ladders game of housing; they prefer the chance to build (or at least plan) a better society to settling for haggling their way to greater comfort at this stage. Their good will (not to mention good looks) takes the edge of cynicism off the sometimes sardonic portrayal of social climbers, opportunists and moralizers around them. The mother is a superb entrepreneur, a tiger in defense of her daughter's right to a lavish living room. A product of bourgeois society, she matches up nicely with many products of an emerging socialist one—especially the opportunistic ad man, who laps up the perks of the professional class. Inside each house up for exchange is another tragicomedy—divorce, the generation gap, and in-law problems all result in hanging out the "se permuta" sign.

window of a vehicle as dry, bare countryside passes by; there seems to be nothing to see, except the power poles and lines which regularly pass the vehicle. Power lines are such a normal part of modern life that we barely notice them. In the present context, however, they are indices of the sophisticated energy and communication systems which use the lines, systems so crucial for the maintenance of the white minority's domination. And to follow this further: whether we participate in *The Is/Land* via TV or film, we are seeing it, implicitly because of our participation in this exertion of power; we are part of the system, the film suggests/demonstrates, as are its makers.

The Is/Land is a cagy (and/or lucky) film. Even its apparent limitations can be seen as contributing to its polemical thrust. The most obvious limitation is the sound quality of the narrations. While the male voice that narrates the passages about Robben Island is clear and distinct, both the female voice which opens the film, providing a series of general statements about the workings of language, and the black man we see and hear delivering a speech in what appears to be a school auditorium, are difficult to understand. The complexity of what the woman says (she opens the film with, "The logic of domination has evolved out of and shored up the foundations of a subjectivity, itself concerned to maintain and reproduce the island of individuality, thereby establishing a subjection manifesting itself on various levels—economic, political, juridical, ideological") and the acoustics of the room in which the man is lecturing (combined with the accent of his English, which I assume is South African) inhibit comprehension; and our frustration further dramatizes the film's central contention: that who we are and how we react and how we are used is as fully a question of our linguistic environment in all of its extensions as of anything else.

—SCOTT MacDONALD

SE PERMUTA

Directed by Juan Carlos Tabío. Written by Tabío, with collaboration by Raúl García. Story by Tabío and Jesús Gregorio, based on an idea by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Photography: Julio Valdés. Cinema Guild, 1697 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

Se Permuta, a farce that revolves around Cuba's housing shortage, is the first unabashed sitcom produced by ICAIC, Cuba's 25-year-old film institute, and a hilarious guide to the state of the heart of Cuban society. It is no accident that its director, Juan Carlos Tabío, has grown up with the revolution.

The plot takes off from the fact that, in a country with a longstanding housing shortage and a frozen market in real estate, people exchange dwellings as their personal circumstances change. The result is that the ever-present plaque, "Se Permuta"—for exchange—on houses is a tip-off to soap opera within. Apartment swapping is fueled by heartthrob and hearth-lust, by sexual and social aspiration.

In *Se Permuta,* a mother (Rosita Fornés, a famous theatrical and nightclub actress) executes a complicated three-way housing swap to move her daughter (the lovely Isabel Santos) to a neighborhood where she can meet a better class of boy. When her daughter, who aspires to be a city planner, meets a fast-talking ad man (Ramoncito Veloz, Jr.), the mother begins another round of swaps to win them the house of the ad man's dreams. Dragged into the scheme is a friend's fiancé, an aspiring engineer (Mario Balmaseda). No sooner is the elaborate plan in place, of course, than lovers start swapping partners, leaving families stranded with furniture on the streets. It takes the rest of the movie to get everyone properly mixed, matched and housed.

At the stable core of the film is the bloom ing love affair between the only two people in the movie who aren't into this chutes-and-ladders game of housing; they prefer the chance to build (or at least plan) a better society to settling for haggling their way to greater comfort at this stage. Their good will (not to mention good looks) takes the edge of cynicism off the sometimes sardonic portrayal of social climbers, opportunists and moralizers around them. The mother is a superb entrepreneur, a tiger in defense of her daughter's right to a lavish living room. A product of bourgeois society, she matches up nicely with many products of an emerging socialist one—especially the opportunistic ad man, who laps up the perks of the professional class. Inside each house up for exchange is another tragicomedy—divorce, the generation gap, and in-law problems all result in hanging out the "se permuta" sign.

SE PERMUTA

The sketches and characters have the quality of caricature, but it is not meanly executed. The jokes are good-tempered, and even the most venal characters have their charm. It helps, of course, that the film's humor is broad right from the start, as is clear from the moment that the ad man approves a large display studded with expensive electric lights for a program on energy conservation.

The film was made from Tabío's hit stage play, which used the same central concept to create a kind of teatro buffo, full of slapstick and comic overkill. Tabío translated it to the screen with the support of master director Tomás Gutierrez Alea, whose *The Survivors* is a kind of precursor, a black comedy of aristocrats who wall themselves into their mansion when the revolution comes to Cuba. The film version of *Se Permuta* is an innovative mix of naturalism and formal play with the medium, welding sitcom to commedia dell'arte.

Tabío used the skills he mastered in documentary work to give a down-to-earth (or at least down-to-ground-floor) feel to the film, and it is rich in throwaway moments of atmosphere—for instance, the opening shots of men in a working-class neighborhood who are girlwatching. His script allows the actors to build character into the action, and the performances, especially that of Fornés, are excellent. He has deployed cinematic techniques to bring in the buffo element. The camera becomes a commentator, with wipes and freeze frames punctuating the plot. The sound track creates its own rhythm and commentary. Saturday-morning-like cartoon music signals the ludicrous, and at one point the sound track chipmunkizes the mother's voice as she rattles on about domestic bliss and consumer heaven. Tabío even goes so far as to stop frames and write cartoon balloons full of comments on them. The film process itself performs the comic exaggeration that actors did in the theater. And so *Se Permuta* gives viewers a two-for-one deal—a plausible set of characters and a cartoon comedy of manners. It's a mark of Tabío's control that you both get the socially critical jokes and also care about the fate of the lovers.

With his bold use of techniques that call attention to the form itself, Tabío turns the viewer into a co-conspirator. At one point, for instance, our hero tries to hail a taxi, always a rare item in Havana. When one not only stops immediately but the driver agrees to go far across town, the hero is so surprised that he does a double take and shrugs into the camera. During the umpteenth housing swap, one of the characters watches a popular Cuban TV show, in which a critic analyzes current film in a genial but sober style. On the TV we see the well-known critic faulting *Se Permuta* itself, for repeating its own joke too many times.

Tabío makes comedy look easy, and *Se Permuta* has the bite that comedy—which thrives on topicality and opposition to received wisdom—has at its best. He has reclaimed the sitcom form for a self-critical film style, and marked himself as a director to watch.

—PAT AUFDERHEIDE

Books

DREADFUL PLEASURES
An Anatomy of Modern Horror

By James B. Twitchell. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. $18.95

This critical survey of the horror film may be the best recent introduction to the genre, touching as it does on so many of the cultural origins of the fantastic. Twitchell, a professor of English at the University of Florida, Gainesville, takes pains to explain the connections of the contemporary genre to the engravings of Hogarth, *The Castle of Otranto,* Goya, Fuseli, as well as to Mary Shelley, Robert Louis Stevenson, Bram Stoker, and other key figures

SE PERMUTA

The sketches and characters have the quality of caricature, but it is not meanly executed. The jokes are good-tempered, and even the most venal characters have their charm. It helps, of course, that the film's humor is broad right from the start, as is clear from the moment that the ad man approves a large display studded with expensive electric lights for a program on energy conservation.

The film was made from Tabío's hit stage play, which used the same central concept to create a kind of teatro buffo, full of slapstick and comic overkill. Tabío translated it to the screen with the support of master director Tomás Gutierrez Alea, whose *The Survivors* is a kind of precursor, a black comedy of aristocrats who wall themselves into their mansion when the revolution comes to Cuba. The film version of *Se Permuta* is an innovative mix of naturalism and formal play with the medium, welding sitcom to commedia dell'arte.

Tabío used the skills he mastered in documentary work to give a down-to-earth (or at least down-to-ground-floor) feel to the film, and it is rich in throwaway moments of atmosphere—for instance, the opening shots of men in a working-class neighborhood who are girlwatching. His script allows the actors to build character into the action, and the performances, especially that of Fornés, are excellent. He has deployed cinematic techniques to bring in the buffo element. The camera becomes a commentator, with wipes and freeze frames punctuating the plot. The sound track creates its own rhythm and commentary. Saturday-morning-like cartoon music signals the ludicrous, and at one point the sound track chipmunkizes the mother's voice as she rattles on about domestic bliss and consumer heaven. Tabío even goes so far as to stop frames and write cartoon balloons full of comments on them. The film process itself performs the comic exaggeration that actors did in the theater. And so *Se Permuta* gives viewers a two-for-one deal—a plausible set of characters and a cartoon comedy of manners. It's a mark of Tabío's control that you both get the socially critical jokes and also care about the fate of the lovers.

With his bold use of techniques that call attention to the form itself, Tabío turns the viewer into a co-conspirator. At one point, for instance, our hero tries to hail a taxi, always a rare item in Havana. When one not only stops immediately but the driver agrees to go far across town, the hero is so surprised that he does a double take and shrugs into the camera. During the umpteenth housing swap, one of the characters watches a popular Cuban TV show, in which a critic analyzes current film in a genial but sober style. On the TV we see the well-known critic faulting *Se Permuta* itself, for repeating its own joke too many times.

Tabío makes comedy look easy, and *Se Permuta* has the bite that comedy—which thrives on topicality and opposition to received wisdom—has at its best. He has reclaimed the sitcom form for a self-critical film style, and marked himself as a director to watch.

—PAT AUFDERHEIDE

Books

DREADFUL PLEASURES
An Anatomy of Modern Horror

By James B. Twitchell. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. $18.95

This critical survey of the horror film may be the best recent introduction to the genre, touching as it does on so many of the cultural origins of the fantastic. Twitchell, a professor of English at the University of Florida, Gainesville, takes pains to explain the connections of the contemporary genre to the engravings of Hogarth, *The Castle of Otranto,* Goya, Fuseli, as well as to Mary Shelley, Robert Louis Stevenson, Bram Stoker, and other key figures

of the gothic tradition. Conscious of the currency of Marx and Freud as critical tools with which to approach the genre, he chooses the latter (with Jungian/anthropological variations) for his model of explanation. His introduction and critical method are sensible and well-supported, but his reiteration of Freud's notion of the *unheimlich* hardly seems timely at this date, nor does Twitchell's variation on Todorov's interpretation of the uncanny.

Twitchell is careful to define and distinguish between the concepts of "horror" and "terror," an exercise central to an understanding of the book, but a labored one for those looking for an interpretation constituting new knowledge. Twitchell associates "horror" with unnameable, primordial fears (represented in the genre by vampires, werewolves, and similar "shape-shifters") associated with childhood and adolescent sexuality; "terror," on the other hand, is fear linked to that which can be known and defined (psychopathic killers, scientific mutations, etc.). The author's approach here, while always erudite and entertaining, is troublesome on several counts. He frequently lapses into a casual tone, freely using collective pronouns ("Our response will be . . ."; "We know where it came from . . .") with little apparent attention to the methodological traps he sets for himself regarding questions of audience perception of the image and of a work's precise social context. His suppositions regarding the definability of psycho killers seem undercut by various passages (especially his final chapter) demonstrating that these manifestations of the monstrous are not only part of the horrific dimension (as the author defines it) but clearly dominant in the genre of the seventies and eighties. Moreover, films from *Psycho* to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* to *The Shining* debunk the science of psychoanalysis as a means of understanding crisis; they also deride the whole notion of "knowing" anything, thus placing the pathological criminal in the same realm, it would appear, as the archetypal spectres of the nightmare—a situation the author obliquely acknowledges. Twitchell argues that as the horrific becomes more predominant in the psychopathology of modern life, archetypal monsters of gothicism and primitive myth become transmutated into the schizophrenics (a term the author uses rather freely) of the current horror genre. The contradictions Twitchell creates for himself do not seem resolved, however, by the equation of Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* with Mr. Hyde.

Also problematical is Twitchell's attempt to distinguish horror from science-fiction. He opts (sensibly) for the term *cinéfantastique* to cover both genres, realizing the amount of thematic overlap to which the forms are subject, but his rather lengthy exegesis of the uncanny elements in *Forbidden Plant* (which he labels "science-fiction horror") is a bit exasperating, especially given his distinct tongue-in-cheek tone while describing the film's self-consciously Freudian themes. Regarding the science fiction issue there are a few other questionable areas, including most obviously Twitchell's association of "big bugs with teeth" with ax-murderers (in his "terror" definition), and his comment that "our" interest in these big bugs was a sixties preoccupation (certainly he is referring to the sci-fi mutants of the atom-age fifties). The basic problem here is Twitchell's failure to separate clearly the principal tenets of science fiction from the realm of the fantastic he feels informs the horror film.

Since Twitchell delimits his definition of the horrific to archetypal nightmare figures, the bulk of the text becomes, predictably, a discussion of Frankenstein, Dracula, Dr. Jekyll/the Wolfman (the shape-shifters) and their progeny; Freud holds sway throughout, particularly *Totem and Taboo* and incest theory, along with more general notions of the genre acting as a safety valve for bottled-up wish-dreams of the spectator. Twitchell makes a nice comment on the Phantom of the Opera figuring as the older man, hidden within the depths of a structure (read, of course, the unconscious) who desires and is temporarily desired by a young girl—one would be hard pressed to find a handier Oedipal model.

Despite the narrowness of some of Twitchell's definitions and a resultant confusion and traveling over well-trod ground, this book is graceful, sophisticated, and engaging. The author's comprehensive knowledge of the genre and the organization of his work make this an important contribution from a pedagogical standpoint; a book on the horror genre with this kind of usefulness is a rare commodity. —CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

Controversy & Correspondence

SEEING AND BEING

Few people take their politics seriously, that is, live their politics actively and consciously in the ongoingness of their lives. For most, politics is a trivial matter of deciding for whom to vote in a presidential election—as though there were real choices—or figuring out where to stand, in the cocktail party chatter, on the latest missile system. For most people, politics is something about which to have opinions, not something to embody in daily action. For such, political films are necessarily about "political things," about trying to win elections, or wars, or battles over nuclear power; and they're about them in a self-serious preachy kind of a way. Usually they're "liberal"—if only because the right-wing program is so vile it's difficult to turn into appealing stories—but not always. *The China Syndrome, Silkwood* and *The Killing Fields* are all liberal political films. *Red Dawn* is ostensibly and self-consciously right-wing.

One consequence of this is to encourage most people to ignore the political content in the rest of the films they see; and since this deprives such films of the sole source of "serious" interest, it allows them to be dismissed as merely "entertaining," "fun," you know, but not something to spend time *thinking* about. No matter how many times one goes back to see them, they remain "releases," "escapes." This, of course, permits "political" situations to remain thoroughly isolated from the daily lives of these viewers, thus relieving them of any responsibility for whatever has transpired on the screen. People leave films like *Country* or *Places in the Heart* for restaurants like Anotherthyme to talk over the hard times in a soft atmosphere; people float away from films like *Missing*—those desperate Latin American countries!—without reflecting for a second on the fact that the United States has the world's highest percentage of its population behind bars; and people drive off from films like *The Killing Fields* in their BMWs and Buicks without managing to connect their possession of these expensive machines with the very root-cause of the American involvement in Cambodia.

But then, life *must* go on. No one expects someone to step out of the theater and walk home, leaving his Audi to be towed off by the cops; but if the films are to have no impact on viewers' lives—and sending a check for $25 to some relief organization is *not* an impact—then the films are merely entertainment after all; and if they are merely entertainments, then why the big pretense that these "political" films are "serious" in a way *Sixteen Candles, Rumble Fish, The Outsiders, The Last Dragon, Vision Quest, The Last Starfighter, Turk 184, Weird Science* and *The Breakfast Club* aren't? It is, of course, pretense, a way of flirting with guilt, of shouldering the burden of responsibility for an hour in the dark of a theater, only to shed it in the parking lot ("I mean, what can one person do . . . really?").

So, because nobody pays attention to the political messages embodied in the rest of Hollywood movies, and because the "serious" "political" films encourage viewers to live the entirety of their political lives in the anonymity of a darkened theater, the result is that films are incapacitated—actively discouraged—from playing *any* role in the political life of the American people. The answer to the question, "What should be done about this deadening reality?" is not, "Encourage independent film-makers," but rather, "Pay attention to what's on the screen already." This is much more difficult, because it's something *you* not the filmmaker has to do; but it is therefore that much more promising, because it leads to the possibility of a lively culture informed and enriched by its films, instead of a comatose culture which they serve as anodyne exclusively.

It *is* more fulfilling to watch a movie with your mind in your head instead of tucked under the seat with the empty popcorn bucket, but it's inescapable that paying attention is also hard work. Beyond trying to fathom how it all adds up into a whole called a film, it means asking, "What are the implications of what I'm seeing for the way I live my life?" One of the wonderful things about *The Breakfast Club,* for instance, is the way it foregrounds this very question in the film itself. This alone makes it politically lucid in a way the makers of, say, *The Killing Fields* wouldn't even begin to understand, and this despite their overt focus on the role of "the media" in the American adventure in Cambodia. Their real interest lies elsewhere, in cheap, old-fashioned melodrama: will the *New York Times's* pushy but nice reporter's faithful native assistant win through the Cambodian revolution—his ghoulish quest laboriously intercut with the desperate and impotent gestures of his guilt-ridden former boss—to sanity, safety and a job with the *Times*? Given the melodramatic narrative, given the sentimentalized dramatic structure of *The Killing Fields,* can there be any doubt that its subject was selected for its sensationalistic qualities alone? *The entire political apparatus of this film lies in its choice of subject, NOT in the way it understands that subject.* Though it says, "This is a topic of interest," it has nothing interesting to say about the topic; and in this way *The Killing Fields* is paradigmatic of the "serious" "political" film, hovering in anxiety over an abstract issue—war, poverty, corruption—embodied in a potboiler of a story (otherwise who would watch it?) sufficiently removed in space and/or

time so that, while capable of raising anxiety in the moviegoer during the screening of the film, it is incapable of inviting the viewer to action, or even the contemplation of action. Worse, because these films typically end on an upbeat note (in this case a freeze-frame of the reporter embracing his escaped assistant), they often generate the sense that any problem that might have existed elsewhere, and formerly) has been taken care of: "Everything's okay, now. Go back to sleep."

But will it make you *behave* differently? That's the question. Obviously not most of the time, though as it happens that's the very question raised in John Hughes's recent films, most explicitly in *The Breakfast Club,* where it's asked of not some hazy sometime either, but of this coming Monday: how will you behave differently *then*? *The Breakfast Club* doesn't take place in the past, or in the future, or overseas, or in the inner city, or in a little town in the backwoods of Georgia; it takes place in one of those suburbs most of us live in, in a high school like most American kids go to. Oh, they do a little dope, but it's not the high school of *Teachers:* cops at the doors, rape and murder in the corridors, flakes in the front of the classroom. It's home. The film gives us five kids serving out a special Saturday detention. They are shown being dropped off at school, in school, and being picked up afterwards. Ten hours elapse. There are no flashbacks, flashforwards, or serious cutaways (except rarely and briefly to the gaoler, the principal). The Aristotelean unities are emphatically preserved. Provoked by boredom, and one of their number, Bender—a classic Dead End kid—the kids talk, and gradually, ever so gradually, they talk to each other instead of to their roles and types. Instead of prom queen to brain, she talks to him; instead of jock to weirdo, he talks to her. The film builds to this false climax, that underneath we're all people, underneath we've all got problems, to tolerance, to friendship . . . groovy. And then, with all five of them sitting there, spaced out on a group-therapy high, feeling fine, pleased with themselves and their progress, secure and isolated from the insane adults who have set them there, the brain looks at the prom queen and asks, "What about Monday?"

"What?"

"I mean, I feel like I'm your friend now—"

"Yeah. You are—"

"But Monday, when you see me in the halls with all your friends, are you going to say 'hi,' or treat me like I don't exist?"

"But—"

"No, really! I mean . . . are we all just going to forget this? Or do we really mean it? What are you going to do on Monday?"

Which is the ultimate political question: what are you going to *do*? In the film the kids talk it over, work it through, and in the end agree they mean it. They all flower in their individuality, come out of their roles completely, find release, freedom. Then detention's over. The BMWs and the Buicks and the Eldorados roll up and take the kids back home. We're left hanging: what *will* they do on Monday? And of course: what will *we* do on Monday?

This would be enough. This alone would lift *The Breakfast Club,* as a politically committed film, above *The Killing Fields,* or *Under Fire,* or *The Year of Living Dangerously.* But unlike these films —rushing breathlessly through their exotic locations—*The Breakfast Club* goes, not farther perhaps (for where is farther than Indonesia, than Cambodia?) but deeper, for in *The Breakfast Club* it is clear that the roles the kids are playing are but the superficial signs of a more trenchant, more serious malaise. You don't notice it at first, in the different parents in the different cars dropping the kids off in the morning—the heavy guy in the heavy station wagon, the Brooks Brothers suit behind the wheel of the swank sedan, you don't even get to see them too clearly, they don't all speak, or not much. In the morning, they're just local color, differences to keep the scene from congealing, or from setting up the wrong train of thought. But in the afternoon—having spent the day with the kids —we read the cars for what they are, confirming signs of class differences. And it's these cars, and these parents, that it's all about.

In the beginning, when the kids first start talking, there is nothing but role playing: you don't care about this school, I do, you're a bum, let's fight. What are revealed, when these roles are stripped away, are automatons, the kids behaving the way they do in fulfillment of the expectations laid upon them by their parents, either directly (the parents expect and get a prom queen) or in reaction formation (the parents expect a prom queen and get a weirdo). None of the kids is free. Bender, the Dead End kid, is a mass of defense mechanisms erected to deal with an abusive father; the brain is expected to perform at such high levels, that he's scared shitless about getting a B; the jock wrestles for his father and his father alone. Worse, like the rest of them, he's in detention for his father's sake, for of a jock his father expects high jinks. In the most moving scene in the film, the camera slowly moving 180° around him as a center, Emilio Estevez, the jock, confesses what he did to land him in detention —tape some kid's buns together, some kid bent over in the locker room, some pathetic kid . . . It could have been played for laughs (in *Porky's* it would have been) but it's not, it's played for its true value, how cruel it was to have done it, and how cruel it was of his father to have expected it of him. While this scene is on the screen, audiences are absolutely hushed, as though holding their breath: this is real, for both kids *and* parents. In *The Killing Fields,* when the assistant is picking his way through a swamp of decaying bodies and gaping skulls, audiences are restless, curious at best, chatting: the film means nothing to them, they are there because they're supposed to be, because the Academy said so, because they're obligated. Audiences at *The Killing Fields* are like the

kids in *The Breakfast Club,* like the jock, driven to do what they do by something extrinsic, something outside of them, something that has something to do with the cars they choose to drive, and the neighborhoods they choose to live in, and the kinds of clothes they choose to buy and wear . . . something to do with the class they're members of, with the class they aspire to, something to do with capitalism and the kind of insane competition it forces people into.

In *Weird Science* this competition is made explicit at its most fundamental level—that of males for suitable mates—where suitable is determined not by any individual's genuine desire or need, but by the kinds of images thrown up by the marketplace. Here the kids are driven not so much by sad parents as by a whole *Weltanschauung* of attitudes and images and symbols, which the dominant males so manipulate so as to control the access to women. Or so it would seem from the bottom of the heap where we find Wyatt and Gary in the opening shot.

The film, however, has already started, before the first frame, back behind the Universal logo, when the kettledrums of the monumental opening of *Also sprach Zarathustra* have begun our preparation for . . . some majestic sight. Perhaps you think it's the "Tums Tune" or the "Theme from *2001.*" That you recognize it is less important than that you sense its stately grandeur. The first laughs, then, come with the first frame and its dirty gym shoes—anything but awe-inspiring—and the motion of the camera, as sublime as the music, mounting the gangling bodies, past the scratching fingers, of two graceless, staring, dumbstruck, adolescent boys. They're funny! *They're funny on the face of it,* but they're especially funny against that music. How far they fail of its image of that fully perfected Superman! These are, obviously, even without having heard of Nietzsche, "the bungled and the botched."

Reverse angle: the boys have been gawking at a gym full of gorgeous, aerobicizing high school girls. But from whence are we seeing these girls? Not, certainly, from the door to the gym (and thus the eyes of the boys); but from the ambrosial heights of the very gods (to which the music took us). From up here, it's the Elysian fields we're looking into. Reverse angle: we're back to the boys, tight on their faces. Gary (Anthony Michael Hall) is constructing a fantasy: "You know what I'd like to do?" "Shower with them," sighs Wyatt (Ilan Mitchell-Smith). Of course it's impossible: the gates to this preserve where none but the gods may graze are forever barred to the botched and bungled. Shower with them? Hit the town? Drink? Dance? Party? Have everyone know their names? "Gary," interrupts Wyatt, "nobody likes us . . . nobody." But Gary knows this: it's just that fantasies are all they've got.

And even these are dashed when a pair of studs—who *are* gods, who *are* the *Übermenschen*—sneak up and jerk down the boys' shorts, calling to the girls, "Check this out!" Knobby knees together, hands crossed before their jock straps—can there be a worse humiliation?

Oppressed by the gods. And Hughes is *not* on heaven's side. Barely two minutes into the film and it needs to be rethought. *Could* it have been mockery of the bumbling boys we heard in the stentorian tones of *Also sprach Zarathustra*? Or might it have been the other way around, a fog unfurled on the Straussian sunrise? A pimple popped on the Nietzschean face? It is possible to make too much of this, but there can be no doubt where Hughes and his weird science stand. Against the tough, godlike, macho male of the Nietzschean Eldorado—embodied in the dudes at The Kandy Bar; in Wyatt's older brother Chet; in Max and Ian, swapping girls like jokes. Hughes sets the Shelleyan alternative of a Promethean humanity, limited but worthy of love, embodied in the boys and in the product of their imagination: tutor, lover, mother, older sister, girl friend, exotic sexpot, the desirable, the voluptuous, the very lovely Lisa.

I know this sounds adventitious. But the fact is that the film *does* open with an aural version of Nietzsche's prophetic rantings; and the fact is that that plot *does* get going when Gary convinces Wyatt to play the role of the Frankenstein they've been watching on TV, a role first played by the eponymous medical student in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus.* But the fact is also that Mary Shelley's novel could never serve as an analogue to *Weird Science* for, whereas Frankenstein—out of his arrogance—creates a monster who finally destroys his creator, Gary and Wyatt—out of the desperation of their need—create an attractive woman who does everything in her power to help them find girlfriends and fall in love.

But it is not merely this inversion of Mary Shelley's tale of the modern Prometheus that suggests her husband's *Prometheus Unbound,* though there is that. More to the point is the way the guys are constrained to confront and subdue both the Nietzschean males themselves *and* the images of power and worth they project. Note the way they are forced to win through to their victory. Gary: "I'm not usually this cool. These aren't my clothes. That's not my car. None of these people were my friends." Deb: "Why are you telling me this?" Gary: "I just want you to like me for what I am." This is a Chicago teenage version of Shelley's reading of Prometheus as, in Mary Shelley's words, "the regenerator, who, unable to bring mankind back to primitive innocence, used knowledge as a weapon to defeat evil, by leading mankind beyond the state wherein they are sinless through ignorance to that in which they are virtuous through wisdom," where evil is none other than that archetype of Nietzschean masculinity, the head stud of all time, Jupiter himself.

But Shelley is no more explicit than Hughes. In *Weird Science* it is thoroughly unrighteous and evil

power that is exploited by Max and Ian, the motorcyclists, and Chet to subdue those representatives of humanity (our humanity—else how could we laugh?), Wyatt and Gary. Nor is this simply figured forth in the humiliation of Gary and Wyatt. It is made completely explicit in the dialogue: "How do you put up with that guy?" Gary asks Wyatt of Chet. "If I don't, he beats the shit out of me." Or as the girl at the perfume counter put it, "Aren't you the guys they beat up at homecoming?"

But though it may reduce to this simple physical tyranny in the end, on the surface the oppression takes many forms; and it is one of the strengths of *Weird Science* to observe that it is imposed under the aegis of love, especially of the sentimental familial variety Chet invokes to justify his extortion of money from Wyatt, as well as strength (and its bedfellows: neat clothes, style, good looks and popularity), in the home as well as in the schools and shopping malls. These *are* the sorts of evil institutions Shelley had in mind. That Hughes has slipped all this into the Levis of laughter only makes it possible to pace the floor of our prison in mixed company. There is no escape through laughter—only anodyne. The way out lies through the imagination.

Stephen Spender has written of Shelley that: "one would see him not as the poet who embraced the view of the perfectibility of man—and the kind of politics which went with this—and who became disillusioned and reactionary, but as one who throughout his work gradually substituted the values of imagination for those of political revolution. The imagination was of a kind which could enclose social despair without social despair turning to retrograde politics. In the end, the most important thing Shelley has to say is not 'the Revolution,' but 'We must imagine that which we know' . . . What Shelley conveys at the end is not revolutionary ideals and free love, but the idea that the world might be redeemed only by imagining it in all its complexity and relating that complex imagining to envisioned goals."

That this is the mode of Prometheus cannot be overlooked; and while it is difficult to shout "Revolution!" in popular American film and be taken seriously, the alternatives are as numerous as directors and scenarists. Without wishing to claim too much, I believe Hughes has chosen that of Shelley, that it is none other than this Promethean imagination that lies at the heart of *Weird Science*—is, in fact, the weird science itself—both as story and as artifact. Certainly it is their imagination and—as Spender adds—"the will to carry out the work which the imagination imposes" that enable Gary and Wyatt to create Lisa in the first place; and if their initial fantasizing is a part of this, it is their growth in imaginative power that finally enables them to see beyond Lisa to Deb and Hilly, to acknowledge, as Gary does to Debbie, that "Lisa was everything I ever wanted in a girl . . . before I knew what I wanted." What Lisa asks of Gary and Wyatt—what Gary and Wyatt ask of *themselves* through this product of their own imaginations—John Hughes has asked of himself. This is that rare film with the imaginative power to not only make its point, but live it.

—DENIS WOOD

ROPE

REAR WINDOW

THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH (1956)

VERTIGO

A Conference on

THE RE-RELEASED FILMS OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK

at PACE UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK,

JUNE 13-15, 1986

A broad range of film scholars and critics will explore the cinematic and cultural richness of these films from a variety of perspectives. All five films will be shown.

For information write or call:

Hitchcock Conference
Department of English
Pace University
New York, New York 10038
212-488-1402

FILM
and the
NARRATIVE

TRADITION

by John L. Fell

A classic study of the origins of film, now back in print with a new introduction.
"Witty as well as scholarly." —*Journal of the SMPTE*
"Dizzyingly documented and well illustrated, an exemplary study of popular culture." —*Library Journal*
"Highly recommended." —*Choice*
$10.95 paper

At bookstores or call toll-free 800-822-6657. Visa and MasterCard only.

University of California Press • Berkeley 94720